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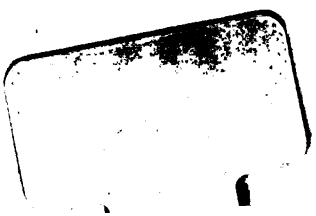

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THE WOLF-CUB

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"It is my officer, my parent!" whispered the young policeman

FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 151

HE WOLF-CUB

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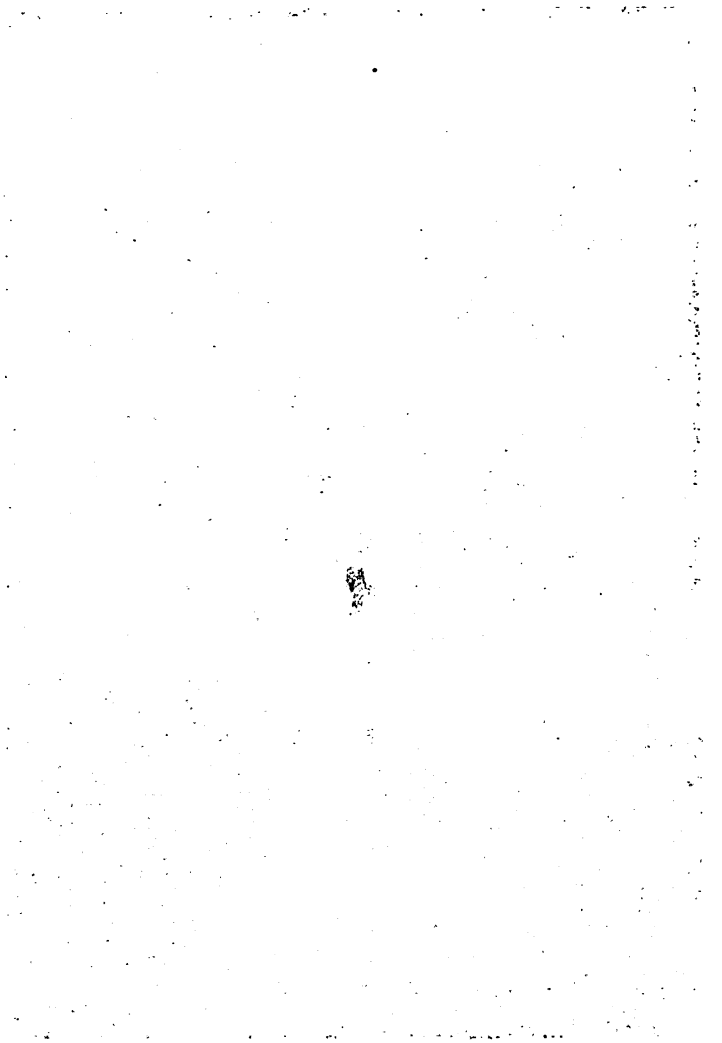

THE WOLF-CUB

A NOVEL OF SPAIN

BY

PATRICK AND TERENCE CASEY

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

H. WESTON TAYLOR

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THE WOLF-CUB

CHAPTER I

WHEN Jacinto Quesada was yet a very little Spaniard, his father kissed him upon both cheeks and upon the brow, and went away on an enterprise of forlorn desperation.

On a great rock at the brink of the village Jacinto Quesada stood with his weeping mother, and together they watched the somber-faced mountaineer hurry down the mountainside. He was bound for that hot, sandy No Man's Land which lies between the British outpost, Gibraltar, and sunburned, haggard, tragic Spain. The two dogs, Pepe and Lenchito, went with him. They were pointers, retrievers. For months they had been trained in the work they were to do. In all Spain there were no more likely dogs for smuggling contraband.

The village, where Jacinto Quesada lived with his peasant mother, was but a short way below the snow-line in the wild Sierra Nevada. Behind it the Picacho de la Veleta lifted its craggy head; off to the northeast bulked snowy old "Muley Hassan" Cerro de Mulhacen, the highest peak of the peninsula; and all about were the bleak spires of lesser mountains, boulder-strewn defiles, moaning dark gorges. The village was called Minas de la Sierra.

The mother took the little Jacinto by the hand and led him to the village chapel. She knelt before the dingy altar a long time. Then she lit a blessed candle and prayed again. And then she handed the wick dipped in oil to Jacinto and said:

"Light a candle for thy father, tiny one."

"But why should I light a candle for our Juanito, *mamacita?*"

"It is that Our Lady of the Sorrows and the Great Pity will not let him be killed by the men of the *Guardia Civil!*"

"Men do not kill unless they hate. Do the men of the Guardia Civil hate, then, the *pobre padre* of me and the sweet husband of thee, *mamacita?*"

"It is not the hate, child! The men of the Guardia Civil kill any breaker of the laws they discover guilty-handed. It is the way they keep the peace of Spain."

"But our Juanito is not a lawbreaker, little mother. He is no *lagarto,* no lizard, no sly tricky one. He is an honest man."

"Hush, *nino!* There are no honest men left in Spain. They all have starved to death. Thy father has become a *contrabandista.* And if it be the will of the good God, and if Pepe and Lenchito be shrewd to skulk through the shadows of night and swift to run past the policemen on watch, we will have sausages and *garbanzos* to eat, and those little legs of thine will not be the puny reeds they are now. *Ojala!* they will be round and pudgy with fat!"

The men of Minas de la Sierra were all wood-choppers and *manzanilleros*—gatherers of the white-

flowered *manzanilla.* Their fathers had been wood-choppers and manzanilleros before them. But too persistently and too long, altogether too long, had the trees been cut down and the manzanilla harvested. The mountains had grown sterile, barren, bald. Not so many cords of Spanish pine were sledded down the mountain slopes as on a time; not so many men burdened beneath great loads of manzanilla went down into the city of Granada to sell in the market place that which was worth good silver pesetas.

There are no deer in the Sierra Nevada—neither red, fallow, nor roe. There are no wild boar. There is only the Spanish ibex. And what poor *serrano* can provision his good wife and his *cabana* full of lusty brats by hunting the Spanish ibex? He has but one weapon—the ancient muzzle-loading smooth-bore. And the ibex speeds like a chill glacial wind across the snow fields and craggy solitudes, and only a man armed with a cordite repeater can hope to bring him down.

Soon descended the mountains only men who had turned their backs upon Minas de la Sierra and who thought to leave behind forever the bleak peaks and the wind-swept gorges and the implacable hunger. Out of every ten only one crawled back, beaten and bruised by the savage Spanish cities and the savage Spanish plains. With those of Minas de la Sierra who could not tear themselves away from their native rocks, these broken-hearted ones continued on and with them slowly starved.

It was not the will of the good God that Jacinto Quesada should have fat pudgy legs by reason of

his father's endeavors. Shrewd were the dogs, Pepe and Lenchito, but they were not so shrewd as were the Spanish police. Came a pale and stuttering *arriero,* a muleteer, up to the village one day. To Jacinto Quesada's mother he brought tragic news.

The men of the Guardia Civil had discovered poor Juanito as he was unbuckling a packet of Cuban cigars from the throat of the dog Lenchito; they had walked him out behind a sand dune; they had made him dig a grave. Then they had shot down Lenchito; then they had shot down Juan Quesada. And then the dog and the man were kicked together into the one grave and sand piled on top of them both.

But make no mistake, *mi señor caballero* reader! The men of the Guardia Civil are not abominations of cruelty. They are not monsters, brutal and depraved. *Quita!* no.

There are twenty-five thousand men in the Guardia Civil; twenty thousand foot and five thousand cavalry. By twos, eternally by twos, they go through Spain, exterminating crime wherever crime shows its fanged and evil head.

Every Spaniard is potentially a criminal. An empty belly goads him into lawlessness; his very nature greases his wayward feet. The Spaniard is by nature sullen, irascible, insolently independent, lawless. He is more African than European. Prick a Spaniard and a vindictive Moor bleeds.

Then, whether it be his famishing hunger or lawless passion which has caused him to rise above the law, the Spaniard, his crime writ in red, flees

from the police. Spain is a country of uncouth wilds. There are the desolate high steppes and the savage mountains; there are the tawny *despoblados,* which are uninhabitated wastes; there are the *marismas,* which are labyrinthine everglades where whole regiments may lie concealed.

But also, in Spain, there are railroads and telegraphs, and a most efficient constabulary, the Guardia Civil. And, were it not for *Caciquismo,* all evil-doers would be speedily apprehended by the Guardia Civil, tried under the *alcaldes,* and incarcerated in the Carcel de la Corte or the Presidio of Ceuta.

Caciquismo is not a tangible thing. It is a secret and sinister influence. It is not the Tammany of New York; it is not the Camorra of Naples. Yet it resembles both these corrupt edifices in its special Spanish way. Its instruments are prime ministers and muleteers, members of the *cortes* and bullfighters, hidalgos and low-caste Gitanos.

A *cacique* may be only the mayor of a tiny hamlet; again, he may be privy councilor to the king. Yet high or low, he is but one of the many tentacles of a gigantic octopus which lays its clammy shadow athwart the land.

It is well known that Tammany, for reasons political or otherwise, protected criminals. Well, even as did Tammany, so does Caciquismo. A Spanish criminal may be captured, tried before a magistrate and all; but if he be one in good standing with the caciques, never is he sent to the Carcel de la Corte or Ceuta. The invisible eight arms of the gigantic octopus uncoil and reach out, the thousand

ducts along those arms open to spew a flood of favors and gold, and magistrate and prosecutor are bought and paid for, and the men of the Civil Guard who cannot be bought, who are incorruptible, are in the Spanish courts betrayed!

Therefore, the men of the Guardia Civil are most high-handed and cruel. The criminal caught in the deed never reaches the Spanish jail. He is shot down on the spot. Bigots for justice are the men of the Guardia Civil!

Carajo! but there was wailing in Minas de la Sierra when came the news of Juan Quesada's death. So many men had gone away and been murdered by the police, and so few were left! Women who had been made widows in the selfsame way as Jacinto Quesada's mother came to the hut and sought to comfort her. But she would not be comforted. For three days she lay on the earthen floor of her hut and beat her hands and her head against the dust. Then she commenced vomiting and swooning like one sick unto death.

They thought it was the cholera. The cholera was forever scaling the high mountains and skulking into the village in the night. A man of the village went for the doctor, Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada. He lived but a few miles from Granada, and the man had to go all down the hills to summon him.

Torreblanca y Moncada was what is called a "hard man." He was a grandee by birth and breeding, a hidalgo of the old granite-jawed, eagle-stern and eagle-haughty Spanish sort—the Cortes y Monroy sort, the Hernan de Soto sort. He worshipped

his ancient name, his high hidalgo blood. His personal honor was to him more precious than life, more sacred than a sacrament, inviolable, consecrated.

When a young man, he had married a woman of race and beauty. She had run off with a Gypsy picador. Don Jaime had put a Manchegan knife down his boot and set off after them, vowing to follow them to the end of the earth even, and to kill them both. But the train, in which the guilty ones fled, had not reached Jaen when it was wrecked, and they both were crushed out of all semblance to two sinful lovers.

With composure and reserve, Don Jaime heard the news. He did not even laugh harshly or curse God for robbing him of his revenge. Only grim, quiet and morose, he returned to his dishonored house and to his baby daughter that had been robbed, sacrileged, and orphaned.

He was quite a rememberable-looking man. His hair had whitened quickly in the years that followed; his skin, from exposure to wind and weather, was a deep swarth; and his eyes were gray. Not many Spaniards have gray eyes. The eyes of Torreblanca y Moncada were a clear, cold, agate gray. All in all, there was about his appearance, especially the long aquiline nose, the stony eyes and pointed white beard, something which seemed to harken back to the days of ruffs and ready swords—the days of the terrible Spanish infantry, the Armanda, the Bigotes, the "bearded men" the Conquistadores.

The mountaineers of Minas de la Sierra knew fear of him and awe. For them he had only a con-

temptuous eye and a bitter smile and a harsh imperious way. They said he had a granite boulder for a heart. But he was very tender with the sick.

He was the sort of physician who looks upon his business of serving the ailing as a sacred commission from on high. He was like one who had taken Holy Orders with his doctor's degree. No Jesuit was more slave to his oaths; no Jesuit worked with more zeal for God and the Society than did Don Jaime for Humanity and Science. The most poverty-abased *labrador,* the most filthy beggar, had but to summon him, and he would arise from his table or his bed and ride across Spain to him who needed healing.

He was the only physician who would journey up the mountains to Minas de la Sierra. It mattered not to him that there were long climbing miles of perilous goat-paths along howling gorges; it mattered not to him that the mountaineers never had money to pay him his just due. He was indeed a "hard man," haughty as Satanas, and grim and dour. But even as his personal honor was to him more precious than life, so was his physician's honor a covenant with Jehovah, tyrannical and imperious to command him.

The old men of Minas were sitting under the cork-oak in the center of the village when the hidalgo doctor came out of the hut of the sick woman.

"Is it not the great illness, Don Jaime?" asked one of the old men, old Castro. He was thinking of the dread cholera.

"No. She is merely sick with despair."

"Ah, that is the great illness of Spain! All Spain is sick with despair!"

"Carajo! but you are right, my father!" answered the Senor Doctor in his bitter way. "Spain despairs. And why not? Spain famishes. There is no food for honest men to eat. And men turn dishonest, thinking by crime to appease their gnawing bellies. They became contrabandistas, *salteadores de camino, abigeos, ladrones.* And the men of the Guardia Civil take them out on the mountainside and murder them.

"Our forefathers," he philosophized, "were refugees from the fall of Troy. Black was their national color; black for their lost cause. They should put a black stripe with the red and yellow stripes of our modern Spanish flag. A black stripe for despair."

"Bueno, Don Jaime!" said the old men. One added:

"We have not studied at Salamanca like you, but we know what we know. Every night the hungry children cry themselves to sleep. Our own porridge bowls are never full. We have seen our sons grow desperate. We have seen them one by one go away. There was Benito, my youngest. He became a contrabandista, and the Civil Guard murdered him. There was Adolpho, the son of my sister Teresa. He also went the same way. There was Santiago Reyes and Mateo Pacheco and Ignacio Parral. And now follows Juan Quesada."

"What would you?" asked the Senor Doctor, with sudden brutality. "The Guardia Civil must keep the peace of Spain. And Spaniards must steal to

live. It is dog eat dog. It will always be dog eat dog while men are Spaniards and Spaniards starve."

He turned abruptly away and entered once more the hut of Jacinto Quesada's mother. When he came out again, he said to the women clustered about the door:

"She is forever kissing the child Jacinto and moaning, 'My poor Jacintito! What will become of thee, thou pale tiny one? My poor, poor Jacintito!'

"It is better that he should be taken away from her until she is herself again. His presence here only deepens her despair. I will carry him with me down the mountain to my *casa* outside Granada and keep him there for a time. I have not much—what Spaniard is rich?—but he will be fed well; he will be given the same food as is given my own daughter, Felicidad."

"Ah, Don Jaime, you have the heart of gold!" cried one woman, her eyes moist and tender.

"The Mother of God reward you, and mend your broken heart, proud Torreblanca y Moncada!" cried another. And the others would have burst out in a full litany of praises, had not the Senor Doctor fiercely said:

"Don't stand there making the monkey of me, you mountain jades! *Quita de ahi! Pronto!* Get the peasants' brat into his jacket and *alpagartas,* and wrap him warmly in his shawl. I desire to get out of this accursed hole as quick as possible. It smells bad, and I itch. The place is lousy!"

CHAPTER II

In the great harsh fist of the hidalgo doctor Jacinto Quesada, who was then ten years old, put his little trembling hand and went down the mountains, and entered a new world.

The *casa* of Don Jaime was large, decayed, dingy, and full of lizards that lived between the crumbling adobe bricks. But it seemed to Jacinto Quesada a sumptuous palace. Besides the hidalgo doctor, there lived in the sumptuous palace two old servants and a pretty little girl with golden hair and legs round and pudgy as would have been the legs of Jacinto, had his father lived and prospered.

In the great rooms that were so bare with poverty, the two children played together. The eyes of the little Jacinto, alert to see all in this new strangeness, had noted a peculiar thing. One day he said to Felicidad:

"Do you love your father, the Senor Doctor?"

The child knuckled her brow.

"It is not the love," she said thoughtfully. "Don Jaime is a very grand and haughty hidalgo; it is not his desire that I should love him. But I fear him much!"

Came a day when Felicidad was very naughty. She tore leaves from the huge old sheepskin-bound books in the great gloomy library, and cut them into paper dolls. It was Don Jaime's one delight to read and reread, in the long hot afternoons, those

yellow-leaved, richly illuminated ancient volumes. Pedro, one of the old servants, informed the doctor of Felicidad's naughtiness. The doctor's face went ashy; he shook all over with rage. He brought out a short whip of horsehide, a *quirta* such as *vaqueros* use. With the quirta he lashed Felicidad's legs and back unmercifully.

Her screams drove like knives into little Jacinto Quesada's heart. He was but ten years old and he was much afraid of the terrible hidalgo. But as the whip pitilessly descended again and again, and Felicidad screamed and writhed in agony, a hot anger welled up in him; he became desperate as only a child becomes desperate; he went mad.

Screaming himself, he charged at the doctor and tore at his trousers with his finger nails, and tried to leap up and upon him. The quirta rose again and fell upon his head. Then he caught at the doctor's wrist and sunk his teeth into it. With bulldog tenacity he hung on, until he was beaten into insensibility, and his jaws forced open.

Strangely, Don Jaime conceived a sort of liking for Jacinto Quesada after that. He took to calling him The Little Wolf of the Mountains. It became his wont to greet Jacinto, when he stumbled across him in the great bare house, with a look of savage admiration and the words:

"Ah, here is the wolf-cub! And how are the fangs to-day, hungry scrawny one?"

Upon a time, Don Jaime, his hand still in bandages, discovered Jacinto alone in the dusky library, bent over a quaint old account of the battles and triumphs of the swineherd Pizarro.

"When did you learn to read, son of a mangy she-wolf?" asked the doctor in great surprise.

"When I was but five. My mother taught me letters. She is a woman of honest birth and of education," answered Jacinto proudly. "When she was a child, she was sent to the convent of Santa Ursola in Granada."

"And what do you think of this swashbuckler, Pizarro? He robbed the Indians of their golden suns and chalices and their silver bars, without morality and without ruth, did he not? But—do you think him cruel?"

The boy nodded his head slowly. Then with the oldish quaintness of a book-bitten child, he explained:

"I do think him cruel, mi senor don. But he would not have been Pizarro had he been soft-handed and pitiful. He led three hundred and fifty Spanish caballeros and four thousand Indians deep into the cordilleras. About him were the millions of the Inca Empire. If he had been less brave, less strong, less cruel, those many Peruvians would have swirled about him like the waters of an ocean, and engulfed him and his poor few Conquistadores. But he knew how to be most cruel. That was why he conquered. That was why he was altogether the great captain!"

When first he discovered Jacinto in his library, Don Jaime had been of the mind to send him bundling, and to lock the door between the peasant boy and his precious old books. Now he turned about abruptly, said "Humph!" and went thoughtfully away.

At last, came an arriero to take Jacinto Quesada back to Minas de la Sierra. She stood beside the mule upon which Jacinto mounted, the golden-haired little Felicidad, and held up her small fat hands for him to kiss. The hidalgo doctor watched his departure from the dark of the doorway. He looked after the great dust-cloud on the brown road for a long time.

"The Little Wolf!" he muttered in his morose way. "He was as famished for knowledge as he was for food. He would have gone blind if he lingered in my library much longer. To see him rip the entrails out of Bernal Diaz's 'Cortes' and the Lives of Balboa, De Soto, Coronado—what a joy! He has eyes of gold for seeing things clearly—for seeing beyond good and evil. And he has a heart of fire, he has gusto, that Spanish boy! *Pizarro was cruel, but he was great, he was magnificent, because he was cruel!* What a Spanish answer!

"Por los Clavos de Cristo! he will go far, that mountain brat! He will be a great realist and philosopher like Cervantes. Or he will be a great dramatist like Lope de Vega. Or a great poet or statesman. Or a great captain like the Conquistadores whose lives he studied with such gusto and whose strength he analyzed with such clear-sightedness!"

Then Don Jaime smiled very bitterly. For the moment he had forgotten that his Jacinto Quesada had been born a Spaniard of the people. He swore a vile oath.

"But no, he will be none of those things!" he

said. *"Caracas!* I am becoming an old driveling fool."

Don Jaime knew that God smiles sardonically upon the Spaniard of the people who seeks to rise in the world. He knew that, just as the United States is a country of unlimited opportunities, just so is Spain a country of opportunities limited and few. The Spaniard of the people, strong with heart and gusto, has but two careers open to him. By those two careers and those two careers only, can your ambitious Iberian attain to fame and fortune, and stand greatly above his countrymen.

"He will become a bullfighter, perhaps!" said Don Jaime.

Every man and boy in Spain is an *aficionado,* a bullfight "fan," a frantic bullfight "bug." The successful bullfighter, be he matador, or murderer of bulls, or only a *peon* of the *cuadrilla,* is given rich food with which to garnish his belly; he learns how gold feels when it is minted into money; his photographs are purchased by romantic *señoritas;* and wherever he goes, he is followed by crowds of tattered street urchins who studiously and hopefully ape his swagger. The whole universe salves and butters him with admiration and envy; and he, the popular *picador* or the distinguished *espada,* is in many ways more truly a king of Spain than is Alfonso the King. Jacinto Quesada, he of the heart of fire and the great gusto, might become a bullfighter.

But suddenly Don Jaime remembered that the little Jacinto was a boy of the desolate mountains. He could never see the great bullfights of the cities of the plains, those great bullfights so golden with

glamor. Hence never would be waked in him the ambition to become a bullfighter.

"Ea pues!" said Don Jaime with grimness. "Well, then! There is naught for my Jacinto to do but to become a *bandolero!"*

The bandolero sells no photographs of himself; he goes houseless in the wind and rain; he bites upon gold coins but rarely; he is hunted persistently by the Spanish police. And yet, from day to day, his deeds have their place in the Hispanic newspapers; he is the hero of a thousand household stories and ballads; the people give him the fat of the countryside to eat; the people love him more even than once they loved that greatest of all bullfighters, the negro Frascuelo!

"Quita!" exclaimed Don Jaime, chuckling. "God forbid!" It had struck him that he might live to the day when people would say in his hearing: "Jacinto Quesada? Ah, he is good, he is brave, he is like the very God Himself. Watch over him in the mountains, Mary, Queen of Angels! and protect him from the Guardia Civil and from treachery!" And he, Torreblanca y Moncada, the prophet who, years before, had seen his vision, would laugh and they would wonder why he laughed.

A bandolero is a Spanish highwayman, a Spanish Dick Turpin, a Spanish Robin Hood. He is a man of a type altogether extinct in countries less backward than Spain. In Spain the type has persisted for five hundred years and still continues to persist. In Spain the type is obstinate, ineradicable.

José Maria was a Spanish bandolero. Diego Corrientes, he who was loved by a duchess, was a Spanish bandolero. And Spanish bandoleros were Visco el Borje, Agua-Dulce, Joaquin Camargo, nicknamed El Vivillo, and Pernales, the blond beast of prey. The bandolero is the blight of Spain. But countries that have been exploited by Spaniards are also affected with the Spanish blight. A bandolero of Mexico is Zapata. And a Mexican bandolero is Pancho Villa, too.

One wintry gloaming of Jacinto Quesada's thirteenth year, there entered Minas de la Sierra a ruddy-haired, blue-eyed, burly man on horseback. He was clad in weather-worn corduroys; a week's golden stubble was on his broad, sunburned face; and his body smelled sourly of sweat. He guided his horse with his knees and heels. In both hands he held half-raised a Mauser carbine.

The horse halted under the cork-oak, but the man did not dismount. He sat looking slowly from right to left, from left to right, along the village street. Presently he shouted:

"Hola, *mis paisanos!* Why do you not come out to greet me?"

With trembling and hesitation they came forth from their doorways. They were like so many wary brown lizards stealing out from their rocks. They formed a tongue-tied ring about the quiet horseman and eyed him with awe.

"I desire food," said he shortly.

"It is our wish to serve you, *maestro,*" said Antonio Villarobledo, speaking for the rest. "You shall have the best of our poor lean store."

Then spoke up Carlos Machado, a showy and presumptuous man.

"Come to my house with me. I have a stew of lentils!"

"But I have a *puchero!*" another bid. "Come with me, *Gran Caballero.*"

Suddenly a woman who had been hiding in her doorway ran out into the street, crying shrilly:

"Do not listen to these selfish stingy Moors, maestro! Come with me—I will kill a pullet for you, the last of my lot! Come with me, I beg you, *caballerete!* To ask you to be my guest, I have the supreme right. My husband was the last man of the village to be murdered by the Guardia Civil!"

Carlos Machado and certain others turned wrathful faces toward Juan Quesada's widow. But she had, indeed, the supreme right, and they dared make no objection when the corduroy-clad *cabalgador* said most heartily:

"Well spoken, woman! I will go with you. Your husband shall not have been murdered in vain and your pullet lived to no good purpose!"

Then he laughed in the faces of the others and said with sudden imperiousness:

"Bring your lentils and your puchero to the widow's casa, mis paisanos! My appetite is the most gorgeous appetite in Spain, and all you have will not be too much for me. Besides you will do well to fat me up, you Spaniards!"

He dismounted and followed Jacinto Quesada's mother, giving instructions to certain of the villagers as to how they should water and fodder his horse.

CHAPTER III

WHEN his mother went out on the mountainside to catch and to kill the last surviving chicken, Jacinto Quesada went with her both to lend her a hand and to ask her a question. She held the pullet to the block and Jacinto raised the axe. Then, the axe poised aloft, Jacinto asked:

"Who is this rough burly man to whom the people do such honor?"

"He is the great Pernales!"

The axe descended; blood spattered the faces of the two; the head of the pullet lay free from the body and still; the body flapped about in a manner outrageous and vile. Said Jacinto, after a moment:

"Pernales, the bandolero?"

"*Si, si!* Pernales, the bandolero, him hunted forever by the men of the Guardia Civil!"

"But why do not the men of the Guardia Civil murder him as they murdered our poor Juanito?"

"Art thou a dullard, child! Thy father was a mere contrabandista. Thy father wished only to be left undisturbed by the police. He was a coward at heart as are most Spaniards who turn dishonest that they might eat. He suffered himself to be captured without a struggle; there was no murder in his bowels!"

She swept on with true Latin eloquence and fervor:

"But this Pernales! The men of the Guardia

Civil fear Pernales as they do not fear men of your poor father's sort. He is muscled like a leopard; he is long of arm; he is deep-loined; and the strength of him is like the strength of the first Spaniard, Hispanus, the son of Hercules. But there is more to him than mere body strength! He is possessed of a strength above body strength, a strength beyond body strength. He is strong in his soul!

"He is strong to live; he is strong to conquer; he is strong to make men die. The bandoleros are all like that. They are arrogant, imperious, absolute. They are like our ancestors, the Cristinos Viejos, the Old Rusty Christians, they who eradicated the Moors from Spain. They are like our ancestors, the Celtiberians, they who bathed in the urine of horses that they might grow hard and muscular, they who asked for no quarter in battle and who gave none.

"A man to be a bandolero must have entrails of iron. This Pernales is of the right guts. He likes nothing better than to meet a policeman alone in the hills and to fight him to the death. The men of the Guardia Civil would capture and slay him if they could; but when they come up to him on the high road, he turns and gives battle with laughter and taunt, with ardor, strength, desperation, and ferocity! Never does he hesitate or falter when comes the supreme moment—the moment when his weakness says 'Be merciful!' and his strength says 'Kill thou, Pernales!'"

His mother sped into the house, but Jacinto stood by the dripping block, immersed in thought.

Presently Jacinto Quesada sat on his little stool

in the far corner of the great fireplace and watched the bandolero eat. What huge teeth he had and how white they were! Over each mouthful the whole broad face worked, the lips and cheeks making a dozen grimaces, the jaws snapping and grinding.

Every little while, the bandolero mumbled from a full mouth some question. He seemed much interested in the murdered Juanito. But it was almost as though he considered poor Juanito's death a humorous mishap; at certain of the widow's remarks he laughed roughly, and his laughter stormed through the cabana like a wind through one of the boulder-strewn passes overhead.

An hour later he was astride his horse again and riding down the goat-path that dropped away from Minas de la Sierra and wound through the lower gorges. It is never the habit of the bandolero to linger in a *pueblo* or village longer than a very short time; most sensational and brief and furtive are his visits.

There was a fat and brilliant moon, that night. It was as though a snow had fallen, the heads and shoulders of the mountains were so white. Down into the dark moaning gorges, one could see a great distance.

Pernales walked his horse very slowly, for the path led along the sheer of a precipice. But while he kept a vigilant eye on the way ahead, ready to throw himself toward the wall of the gorge should the nag stumble on a loose stone, or shy from the path, and plunge screaming into nothingness, Pernales continually cast wary quick glances toward the

crags and boulders overhead, and continually bent his ear back the way he had come. It was almost as though he feared an ambush in that lonely perilous place. It was almost as if, at any moment, he expected men of the Guardia Civil to rise from behind every rock, and the command of the Guardia Civil to sound in his ears:

"Alto a la Guardia Civil!"

He rounded a great rock that threatened to tear from its moorings down into the winding gorge below. Abruptly he halted his horse and his carbine came up. A long tense hush. Then suddenly he exploded:

"Who are you that stands beside the way?"

Came the answer in a child's thin voice:

"Jacinto Quesada!"

Minas de la Sierra was a long distance above and far back in the sierras. With great surprise the bandolero recognized the child to whom he had waved a hand and called a laughing "á Dios" some time before.

"Are you alone?" The carbine still threatened.

"See for yourself, maestro! But I am altogether alone."

The bandolero rode nearer. When the horse shouldered up, the little Jacinto was compelled to squeeze into the very crevices of the rock wall, so narrow was the path.

From his lofty seat on the big, rawboned black horse, Pernales looked down at the son of the widow Quesada and measured, with his eyes, the boy's extreme youthfulness and preposterous lack of strength and size. Jacinto was only thirteen years old.

What he saw altogether reassured Pernales. His blue eyes twinkled; he smiled; he grinned, his lips working and twitching; and at last he broke out in a frank and free burst of laughter.

"Cascaras!" he roared, between guffaws. "How came you here, lively little one? Have you the sharp hoofs of the ibex to gallop you from crag to crag, across gorges and *gargantas* and all? Or have you the griffon vulture's wings that you may fly over mountains? You are no real flesh and blood child! You are a sprite, a—"

Jacinto Quesada, imperious with a great desire, brushed his bantering words aside. Trembling with eagerness, he cried:

"Take me with you, Pernales! I would be a bandolero, too! Lift me up behind you on your horse, and I will go with you through Spain and be your *compañero* and your *dorado*—your golden one, your trustworthy one! Take me with you, please, please, Pernales!"

The bandolero did not credit his own ears. He was too astounded to laugh.

"Hola!" he gasped. "What is this now? You, my chicken, would be a bandolero! And you came all the way down here to recruit with me! Por los Clavos de Cristo!"

Then soberly and slyly, for he was beginning to see good fun in the little fellow:

"But do you not know that it is a rule, a convention, of us good bandoleros to ride alone? Solitary and single-handed, we are safer and stronger than if a troop of cabalgadores surrounded us. There is no one so swift and slippery and elusive as a bando-

lero who rides alone, and no one so free from fear of treachery—he trusts no man and no man he dreads."

"True. You understand your business, I see," said Jacinto Quesada.

He was only thirteen; yet he spoke slowly, with deliberation and discernment and a great air of mannish profundity. He had got something from Don Jaime's books, this mountaineer's bantling!

"But there are times," he qualified, "when even the most superb bandolero needs assistance in some serious and signal business. Have you not yourself a *dorado,* a *camarada,* who rides with you on your greater crimes, the Nino de Arahal? Certain folk have told me of the Nino; they said he shared the glory of those enterprises which made imperative a show of numbers and strength; do not tell me these folk lied! I had hoped to dispossess this camarada and dorado of yours, this Nino de Arahal, and to attain to the envied place down from which I threw him headlong!

"But the Nino," he added, arrogating to himself judicial authority—"let us forget him! Za! he is only an insignificant frog! Your wish to ride unhindered and alone, of that I would speak! Maestro, when I become your dorado, we will ride together always, for we will commit only imposing and glorious crimes!"

Said Pernales softly:

"But how would you dispossess the Nino de Arahal?"

"I would pit against the huge gorilla's head of the Little One of Arahal, my head of gold for thinking

quick thoughts and audacious ones. I would displace him and replace him by my natural superiority of brain. But if that were not enough—Carajo! I would lock knives with him, I would lunge and slash and rip and stab with my *navaja,* while he tore and stabbed and slashed and lunged with his, until one or the other of us gushed out his life through his wounds and was dead!"

Then it was that Pernales laughed so that the very canyon roared and rang. He rolled back his head; he clapped his hands to his stomach; he opened his mouth to its widest stretch; and he guffawed so tremendously that the horse beneath him staggered and almost overbalanced from the wall. He was Olympian in his laughter.

And why not laugh? Did he not see in his mind's eye the gigantic ruffian nicknamed the Nino de Arahal locked with this stripling, this barefoot child, this suckling babe? Za! The Nino would make ten of him! *Zape!* The Nino would swallow him at a mouthful! It was preposterous! It was so funny, he cared not a peseta if he laughed himself to death!

But suddenly, through his laughter, slid Jacinto Quesada's low-toned words:

"But if he were altogether too huge and brawny for me to murder in open combat, then I would murder him in some hidden, treacherous way. Treachery is the strength of the weak who are yet strong. If there be no other way, the superior brain resorts to treachery for the superior brain is invincible. While I am still weak of body, I will not disdain to use treachery!

"And, man, man, I warn you! Do not continue to laugh at me! You have laughed quite enough at me, Pernales! Cease laughing this instant! Quick! Straighten your face, or *Porvida!* the Manchegan knife I have with me, I will use on your horse. I will rip open his belly; and he, with you upon him, will go bounding off the path and fall head over heels down into the abyss!"

Instantly Pernales sobered. His face set into an emotionless mask; his teeth clenched together with an audible click; his eyes became hard as blue bright pebbles. Without seeming to do so, he looked down at the child's hands; and true! there was in those hands a huge, flat-bladed dagger, a dagger of La Mancha. The child was turning it over and over, and studying it with a pensive interest.

Deep within himself, Pernales laughed ironically at his own discomfiture. He could not use the carbine. Without chancing the great risk of sending his horse recoiling and reeling off the path, he could not strike down the child with a blow of his fist! And the child had but to turn aside his gun or dodge his hard fist, and crouch out of harm's way beneath the horse's barrel. Then might he strike up with the dagger, and the horse would make the break-neck plunge as surely as he would scream when stabbed.

"Jacinto Quesada," said Pernales bitterly, "you have caught Pernales in a pretty deadfall! Use your knife; then go for the Guardia Civil and guide a brace of policemen to where my body lies on the bottom of the gorge, and there awaits you the money offered for my head! Cascaras! I judged you

altogether too superficially; I was too contemptuous!"

Quietly Jacinto Quesada put the Manchegan knife back in his belt.

"I forbear to strike," said he, "since you have confessed your fault. Now, soberly and with due respect, give me your answer. Will you take me with you?"

A gleam of admiration lit the eye of Pernales.

"Jacinto Quesada," he said, "you are no child. You have shown resolution, force, finality; you are altogether masculine, altogether *varonil;* you are a man! Therefore, as one man to another, I say: No, I cannot take you with me!"

Pernales now was very serious.

"To be my dorado, it is not enough that you have a full-grown soul. You must have a full-grown body; and your body is still the puny, soft-boned body of a child. If you rode away with me, you of the weak body, your strong soul might be sacrificed to the Nino de Arahal or the Guardia Civil. And that—God forbid!

"Let us look at this matter like two sensible Moors. Don Eduardo Miura, let us suppose, has a young fighting bull of extraordinary promise. At the *Tentaderos* (the breeders' private bullfight, when the young bulls are ranked according to their merit as fighting animals), this youngster shows superb courage and astounding ferocity. But he is only two years old; and five years old must be the age of Don Eduardo's animals before he exhibits them in the Plaza de Toros. Does Don Eduardo make an exception of this unique bull, does he allow

him because of his astounding ferocity to have a premature début in the bullring? Name of God, no! Not even if he be as magnificent with meat as the most mature seven-year-old!

"Jacinto Quesada, quickly I have grown to love your strong soul—I have grown to love your strong soul too much. And that is why I say, I cannot take you with me. No! Porvida, no! But, if you are resentful, use your knife and send me whirling down into the gorge. Proceed! I care not a peseta what you do."

Jacinto Quesada stood motionless as a rock, thinking deeply. Something in the boy's downcast attitude moved Pernales to pity.

"Do not despair, my fire-hearted, *arrogante* little man," he said presently. "I have said no; this time my no is absolute; but I shall not say no to you, should I pass this way again when you are more fully grown. Some day, I promise you, I shall again pass this way, and then if you are still of the mind to be my dorado, you may join out with me and we will murder the men of the Guardia Civil together, two sworn compañeros. Meanwhile, grow brawny, grow brave, grow high-handed. There will always be room in Spain for haughty resolute ones like you!"

"I accept the promise given," said Jacinto Quesada. "And I do not ask you to swear to return for me—a word is enough between men. Now, knowing you will come back, I will compose myself and wait. A child is impetuous and fretful; a man is implacable yet patient."

"Son of the widow Quesada," returned Pernales

magnificently, "on the promise given and taken, let us strike hands! With a handshake, like two true Spaniards, we will bind the bargain."

Jacinto Quesada took his hand off the hilt of his Manchegan navaja and gripped claws with the bandolero. A certain note of solemnity thrilled through the moment.

The bandolero started on.

"Go thou with God, compañero!" said Jacinto Quesada.

"Grow big, grow strong, thou!" said the great Pernales.

CHAPTER IV

JACINTO QUESADA grew bigger, stronger. But he suffered more with ambition than with growing pains. Ambition is the seed of greatness, but the seed cannot germinate and bourgeon without giving agony and labor to the soil in which it is nurtured.

Pernales did not again pass that way. Three months had not intervened, since the promise to return had been given, when the great bandolero was murdered for the reward by a Gallego on a lonely hill-road in the Asturias—shot through the head at forty yards.

Now, if never could Jacinto Quesada ride with Pernales, then by the Life! he would ride alone.

When at last he attained to manhood, he went down the mountains, stole a carbine and a horse, and became a bandolero errant and free.

He had hands of gold, that fire-hearted Spanish boy, for sticking up a troop of caballeros and their ladies out for a *merienda* or a bull-baiting on the parched plains about Madrid. And he had hands of gold for sticking up a diligence full of notables in the savage defiles of the Sierra de Guadalupe or the Sierra de Gredos or the Sierra de Guadarrama. And he had courage and originality. Why, he was still a mere novice as a bandolero, an apprentice hand, a *novillero,* when he took it into that round, young, handsome and arrogant Spanish head of his to waylay and loot the Seville-to-Madrid Express!

Spanish highwaymen, you must know, are not in the habit of holding up passenger trains. To waylay a lone muleteer in the mountains, to halt and rob a party of itinerant guitarists and dancers, or to pillage the *hacienda* of a rich rural cattle breeder are the conventional things to do. But to hold up the Seville-to-Madrid—it is unthinkable, it is not the will of God! Spanish highwaymen prefer to do less spectacular deeds and to live to see their grandchildren.

In the province of Ciudad Real, the Seville-to-Madrid Express crosses the river Zancura by means of a safe and modern steel cantilever bridge built by Le Brun, a French engineer. And a half hour before it reaches this steel bridge, the Seville-to-Madrid crosses another bridge, a bridge over a small tributary of the Zancura which is dry three fourths of the year. This bridge is not of steel; it is timbered. It was never built by Le Brun; it is flimsy, weatherworn, and liable to give under any unusual strain. It is called the Arroyo Seco Bridge.

Here, where the Arroyo Seco lies like a great brown gutter across the world, are the high *parameras* of La Mancha. There are no more desolate and lonely uplands in all Spain. Swarthy, sunscorched and thirsty, they torture the eye with dusty dun distances and prone dun lines. You would think it an altogether unlikely place for a bandolero to stage a hold-up.

And here, a hundred yards below the Arroyo Seco bridge and close beside the railroad track, waited Jacinto Quesada one hot, dry, windless afternoon. He was seated upon a small sleek mouse-colored

Manchegan pony. He wore corduroy leggins, a sheepskin *zamarra,* and a Cordovan sombrero that had once been white. His dress was that of the typical Manchegan herdsman. He looked like any one of the hundred or more vaqueros who lived the wild lonely life of the cattle country roundabout.

The Seville-to-Madrid showed in the southwest. Like a somber black snake it crawled slowly forward —like a black snake laggard and heavy after a great dinner of mice.

Spanish passenger trains are altogether unlike American passenger trains, for American passenger trains eat up distances like the brazen cars of old Northern gods. The passenger trains of Spain are most deliberate and slow. They halt for ten minutes at every wayside station, for no better reason than to allow the passengers to alight, unlimber their legs, and smoke the eternal cigarette. They are the very crawling snails of the earth!

Of course, the Seville-to-Madrid was an express, a through train. But you may be sure she was no fast train except when viewed through Spanish eyes. At fifteen miles the hour, morosely it crawled on. It neared the waiting Jacinto Quesada and, fearful of the flimsy wooden bridge beyond, slackened its pace to a painful glacier-slow flow.

As the wheezing locomotive lumbered up, Jacinto Quesada, with knees and one hand, held the shuddering pony motionless beside the track. The other hand he raised aloft. Pointedly, his eyes turned to that upraised hand; then to the locomotive's cab; then significantly, to the upflung hand once again.

The engine driver, one arm extended to the throt-

tle, a blue-smoking cigarette between his lips, leaned far out the cab and looked down at the uplifted hand of Jacinto Quesada. In that significantly uplifted hand of Jacinto Quesada was an unlighted cigarette.

Now, an American engineer would have passed unheeding by, with perhaps a curse for Jacinto Quesada as an arrant fool. Again, a French engineer might have called back: "It is a pleasure!" and thrown down a paper of matches. For, as it was plain to see, Jacinto Quesada was requesting, in pantomime, a spark to ignite his hopelessly dead slim cylinder of tobacco.

But the Spanish engine driver did neither of those two things. It is not that the Iberians are not as polite as the French; they are more polite and altogether more ceremonious. Know you that in Spain, and also in Mexico, it is considered something of an insult to proffer a man matches when he requests a light of you and you yourself are smoking. It is as though you consider him socially beneath you, when you proffer him matches.

The locomotive lumbered by. But the engine driver crowded forward on his seat; his arms worked; the whistle shrieked. And the train groaned and jolted, roared and banged to a full stop.

Passengers telescoped themselves out of windows, some knocked all a-scramble by the sudden halt, others pale and frightened. Those heads that protruded from fortunate windows saw the engine driver clamber down from his high turret, a lighted cigarette in his hand. And they saw spur forward to meet him, the dusty vaquero, in his mouth a cigarette that was dead.

The vaquero flung himself from his pony. He and the engine driver drew together. A hand of each met, became entwined. Their heads leaned close, the cigarettes between their teeth touching ends.

Suddenly the engine driver staggered away from the vaquero, his jaw dropping, his cigarette falling unheeded to the ground. A huge long-barrelled revolver in the hand of the vaquero was nuzzling his umbilicus.

"Aupa!" shouted the vaquero harshly. "Up!"

Prodding his belly persistently, the vaquero followed him back, step by step. The engine driver was suddenly enlightened. It was all a piece of herdsmen's buffoonery, a monstrous practical joke!

"Benito!" he roared, addressing his stoker in the cab above. "Benito, look down! Here is a vaquero who thinks himself a *salteador de camino,* a bandolero like the poor dead Pernales or that new man, Jacinto Quesada! *Por los Clavos de Cristo!* what a fool's idea!"

Then to the vaquero. "Don't you know I have no time for horseplay, you silly one, you buffoon, you? You are making yourself liable to arrest!"

"I am the new man, Jacinto Quesada!" said Jacinto Quesada with politeness and reserve. Then. "Aupa, aupa!"

"Jacinto Quesada—Almighty God!" gasped the engine driver. Only he made it, *"Todopoderoso Dio!"* and he groaned it out slowly.

But with great alacrity he put up his hands.

Then after a moment, stuttering with fright, he commenced objecting.

"But caballerete—but Don Jacinto—"

"What would you?"

"But you cannot hold up the Seville-to-Madrid! No one ever holds up the Seville-to-Madrid! And besides, you are alone!"

"But I am not alone," returned Jacinto Quesada.

Nor was he. Out of the Arroyo Seco, a hundred yards up the track, three men as drab and dusty as he had poked their dishevelled heads.

Shouted Quesada, *"Adelante,* mis dorados! The stew is ready, approach the bowl! Forward, my golden ones!"

CHAPTER V

THE Golden Ones approached at a run, showing in their hands carbines of no recent fashion. They were rough-bearded fellows of impetuous courage but of little skill or fame; reckless scapegraces whom he had picked up, on the plains and in the mountains, to reinforce him in this most pretentious and uncommon hold-up.

After the consummation of the deed, they would go their ways and he his. Like most Spanish *bandoleros en grande,* Jacinto Quesada preferred, whenever he could, to keep his heels clean of confederates and coadjutors; he preferred to hold himself aloof and solitary. However, they were his companeros for the nonce; for the nonce, they were his dorados, his golden, his trustworthy ones.

One of them clambered up into the cab after the fireman, Benito. The rest, under the supervision of Jacinto Quesada, proceeded to turn inside out the Seville-to-Madrid.

Pretentious train robberies are forever much alike. Save that those waylaid and despoiled were Spaniards, and Spaniards are eternally themselves, and their souls glow frankly and incandescently out through their bodies in everything they do, the hold-up of the Seville-to-Madrid was like an American train robbery, like a train robbery anywhere.

The mail coach was first disposed of. Then the highwaymen turned their attention to the passen-

gers. In a jostling, milling, frightened drove on the open plain to the right of the stalled coaches, the passengers were herded by the four taciturn workmanlike bandoleros. Then one by one each passenger was led forward from the rest and searched for money and valuables.

Those who were cowardly, quaked and walked knock-kneed, their mouths stuttering rapid prayers. Those who were courageous but overawed, clenched their teeth in their lips, held their eyes pasted upon the bandoleros, and did silently and with utter obedience that which they were told to do. Those who were weak, wept. Few words were said, yet the faces of all were as a loudly chanted litany of dreads.

Jacinto Quesada took little part in the searching; he left that to his journeymen. He stood aloof, his revolver in hand, his eyes studying pensively, as they were put to the search, the demeanor of the brave and the base.

Many of the herded and driven and robbed wondered at this boy with no vestige of hair on his smooth brown cheeks. They did not know him. They thought Jacinto Quesada, he who had begun making such a great noise through Spain, one of the bearded, black-visaged, older men.

First to be led forward and made to deliver was a traveler for a Barcelona manufactory. Then came two brokers who had been speeding about Spain to make contracts on the grape, olive, orange, and apricot crops. Then came a wine taster, one cork grower, and three cattle breeders; and then a troupe of Gitanos, Gypsy musicians and dancers of

the metropolitan cafés. And these having been plucked in their proper sequence, there was led forward a wisp of black-clad nuns.

Jacinto Quesada stepped forward and took off his hat to the nuns. He motioned that they should be brought back to their old places without suffering the sacrilege of search, and he said, "Your pardon, Ladies of God!"

Then was led forward a foreign looking man, a globe-trotter who had been traveling alone. He was big, broad-shouldered, fair-haired and as smooth-shaven as any bullfighter. He was square of face, his jaw was a round resolute knob, and his eyes were blue and hinted of being quick to laugh. Struck by the foreign look of the man, Jacinto Quesada stepped forward once again and, with an air of ingenuous curiosity, asked, "You are a Frenchman, are you not?"

It is a fact that most Spaniards mistake all foreigners for either Frenchmen or Englishmen. And they never can distinguish between persons of the two races.

Answered the outlander, "I am neither, *muchacho.* I am what you Spaniards call a *Yanqui,* a *Norte Americano.*"

"Cascaras! You are one of those who gave Spain such a great beating a few years ago and robbed us of Cuba and the Philippines. Thorough and impudent salteadores de camino, you Yanquis seem to me! But sometimes it does a person or a country good to be beaten and robbed. Spain is the better for having had her buttocks soundly spanked; and the Philippines and Cuba—

zut! they were ulcers on her flesh, and Spain is sincerely thankful she submitted to the surgeon's knife, now that the thing is done!"

At the philosophical and rather elevated tone of the boy, the American raised his eyebrows in surprise. Yet he had traveled in Spain some months already, and he should have been used to Spanish logic and Spanish eloquence.

The race of the Cristinos Viejos is an old, old race, full of salt and masculinity and knowledge that is not to be acquired in schools. In a country where any peasant will argue or exchange racy jokes with Alfonso and even slap him on the back in the ensuing hurly-burly of merriment, where a hidalgo will eat with his coachman, and a beggar light his cigarette from that of a bishop, how otherwise than the way Jacinto Quesada talked, would a man of the people talk?

So this was the notorious Jacinto Quesada, he whom all Spain had commenced talking about! Smiling a smile of appreciation, the American said:

"I think you are very well right about the recent war. You Spaniards are certainly long on common sense. But you are young to be a philosopher, Don Jacinto."

At least, that was what he tried to say. But he was speaking in Spanish and he was not altogether at home in the idioms of the language. However, Jacinto Quesada got his meaning.

He felt pleased, did Jacinto Quesada, to be called a philosopher. With a smile he remembered the ferocious way of thinking which had caused him,

when a child, to seek to be the dorado of the poor dead Pernales—that savage philosophy which had finally moved him to become a bandolero. He was not nearly so impetuous and fiery and bigoted a youngster as then; he was more serene, more Apollonian, more pensively thoughtful.

But the American was speaking. Thinking to be polite and, at the same time, rid his system of a sally typically American in humor, he said, "It is pleasant to meet a Spaniard like you!"

Quesada caught the inference. He smiled, showing his clean white teeth, and returned, "It is pleasant to rob you, senor!"

And he added, struck with surprise that a man could joke while in such an awkward and even perilous position, and startled by his surprise into admiration and wonder:

"To know you, caballero, is to know why your countrymen won the recent war. You are a man of the great bravery; you are as brave as the very God Himself!"

Your American is forever afraid lest he be made the butt of irony and ridicule, the target of satire and sarcasm. His very self-consciousness indicates how vulnerable he is to others' opinions of him; and his extreme reserve is only a cloak worn eternally to mask the weakness. This particular American changed countenance as he had never changed countenance when menaced by the bandoleros' carbines; he went white and cold, his eyes flashed angrily. And sharply, he exploded:

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you do not recoil from the rough touch

of my dorados; because your eye fearlessly meets my eye; because you talk without falter and without affected ease; because you act like a man who is a man!" explained Jacinto Quesada with sincerity. And to clinch the argument, he added, Spaniard-like, "I am utterly brave myself. Do you think I cannot recognize men of my own kind?"

The American fidgeted, blushed slightly, and smiled a very rueful smile.

"But why, if I am so very brave," he countered, "did I not rebel and kill some of you when your men herded me out on the prairie with the rest, and then yanked me forward to pick my pockets? There is a Colt's automatic in my hip pocket, but you'll notice I have not used it!"

"A brave man is not necessarily a brave fool like the hidalgo don, Quixote of La Mancha," returned Quesada shortly. "You Americans are a sentimental race."

Then, turning to one of the searchers, he ordered, "Relieve the Yanqui caballero of the pistol that is such a temptation to him, Rafael Perez!"

Presently, eager to have their turns and be done with the necessary formalities, pressed forward a cuadrilla of bullfighters. A few of them wore the ordinary street dress of men of the profession. They would be known anywhere in Spain for bullfighters by their broad, stiff-brimmed, low-crowned black hats and their black, tightly fitting clothes.

The most of them were still in bull-ring costume, however. In the busy months of the Taurine Sea-

son, when bullfights are almost daily events and contracts must be fulfilled, the Brethren of the Coleta are kept continually on the jump—rushing precipitantly from town to town, from bull ring to railroad train and straightway again to bull ring—and they have little or no time to change from bull ring costume into street clothes and scarcely more time to spend in eating, sleeping, or doing anything else than murdering bulls. Therefore, it is a habit with bullfighters to railroad everywhere about the peninsula in full ring regalia; and one often sees these athletes speeding, gorgeously clad, over the desert *vegas* or alighting at the depots of bullfight-crazy towns.

First to come forward was the espada, the dexterous with the sword, the murderer of bulls, the man of death.

Jacinto Quesada took one look at him, then with gusto cried, "Por los Clavos de Cristo! if here is not the great Morales!"

"*Seguramente,* yes, I am the great Morales!" returned the matador, bowing in acknowledgment of the swift and hearty recognition. He wore pink silk stockings, gold-braided green silk breeches, waistcoat, and jacket, a white ruffled shirt, a crimson tie, and a black cap. He wore the black rosette and ribbons of the matador in his *coleta,* his queue —that long, thick, and sacred lock of hair all bullfighters wear as the time-honored insignia of their ancient profession.

He was not yet thirty. He was a little below the middle height. He had a long body and short muscular legs. He was all iron and strength. And his

brown Andalusian face was the typical young bull fighter's face, boyish, almost effeminate with its mild contours; a face made expressive and pleasing by eyes soft, dark, thick-lashed and very brave; a face that was the easily read table-of-contents of an honest, simple-souled, intrepid man.

Jacinto Quesada's eyes smiled, and his whole face beamed, as he looked at him, for he recognized in this man whom he had long admired because of his splendid courage in the bull ring a kindred spirit.

"And how are the wife and the children, Manuel?" he asked.

"Most excellent in health, thank you, Jacinto! And you? And your family?"

"Superb! But ah, Morales, what would I not give to be watching you killing your bulls in the Seville bull ring at this moment, instead of doing what I am—setting my dogs of ladrones upon you to rob you of your hard-earned money! Say but the word, and you will be exempted from this indignity!"

"A thousand thanks; but no, I would rather not! It is too much honor!"

"Too much honor for you, one of the three bravest men in Spain? You, whom I have ridden fifty miles many times to see give the *suerte de matar,* the stroke of death! Why, to sit in the sun and watch you perform, I have ventured into Seville in disguise when the men of the Guardia Civil were as thick about the bull ring as flea-bitten curs about a camp of Gitanos; and I have counted the risk nothing!"

"But if I am one of the three bravest men in Spain, as you say, who are the others? Who is the second? Who is the third?"

"The second! Can you not guess?"

"Ah, *chispas!* yes. Yourself, Jacinto Quesada, of course!"

"And the third?"

The brow of the matador darkened with professional jealousy. Tentatively he asked, "You do not mean the espada, Lagartijo, do you?"

"No; I do not like Lagartijo's ceremoniousness and caution; I like only *diestros* of the good old charge-and-take-a-chance Sevillian school. I mean that Yanqui traveler over there. He is like us two; he is an iron-boweled man!"

The bullfighter turned around and took a good look at the lone American. Then he slapped his breeches and jacket and invited the bearded salteadores to continue with the search.

After the cuadrilla of bullfighters came a fat gray parish priest; then several tourists from Central and South America; then a pretty flight of rosy and demure young convent girls, bound northward under the vigilant watch of two prim sallow *duennas;* and then a tall blond man with a straw-colored mustache darkened and stiff with wax.

It was palpable this man was no Spaniard. He was dressed with neatness, even elegance. Strangely, his face looked much older than his lithe athletic body. It was a sharp, clever face, but a peculiar ashy pallor overspread it and, about the mouth, there were hard grim lines. The nose was long, high-bridged, predatory. The eyes were slate-

colored, small and bright and furtive. They had a peculiar trick of drooping at the outer corners, a trick that gave him a calculating and rather sinister look.

He had been traveling with his young wife, a very lovely slip of a girl. Her turn was to come next. She stood at the edge of the muster of people, looking after her foreign-looking husband with blue eyes oddly eager rather than anxious. She was a golden-haired girl of the rare Castilian blond type. She seemed made all of gold, ivory, and rose petals. Among all those frightened people, she alone was without fear. As she stood there, looking calmly about her, she seemed altogether the innocent and trustful child; to all appearances she should have been still in some Spanish convent, sequestered and secure—not abroad in the world where there are bandoleros and even men of worse sorts.

Her husband, the foreign-looking man, was about to be put to the search when, aroused by something more than curiosity, Jacinto Quesada stepped forward and asked brusquely, "You are a Frenchman?"

"I am a Frenchman, *monsenor.*"

"And why, Frenchman, do you make signs with your hands to me?"

With good reason Jacinto Quesada asked that question. Ever since he had been singled out for the search, the Frenchman, looking everywhere but at his hands, had been persistently making covert signals with those hands. First he drew two fingers down across his left cheek; then he made certain

finger movements very like the word-spelling finger movements of the deaf and dumb; and finally he stroked his throat and Adam's apple with a certain lingering wistful care!

CHAPTER VI

THE pale Frenchman looked full at Jacinto Quesada, and suddenly his small slate-colored eyes blazed like sunlight on ice.

"Do you not comprehend of the signs the meaning?" he asked sharply in tolerable Spanish.

"No."

"Nor that which I desire you to understand when I do this thing?"

Impetuously he stepped forward and grasped, with his right hand, the right hand of Jacinto Quesada. What followed seemed only a most ardent handshake. Then he dropped Quesada's hand and stepped back, assuming his old passive pose. And only Quesada knew that there had passed between them another signal—he alone knew that the Frenchman, on gripping his hand, had tapped the wrist of that hand with his index finger twice.

Rumpling his brow, the youthful bandolero consulted with himself for a space. Then, his face clearing, decisively he said:

"No, Frenchman, your signals to me have no meaning. It is, perhaps, that I am not of sufficient knowledge; I am only a poor Moor of Andalusia, you know. But what is the message you wish to convey by your cabalistic signs? I am curious, senor; tell me in honest Spanish and interestedly I shall listen."

The tall blond Frenchman laughed ruefully under his waxed mustache.

"As you do not comprehend my signs," he said, "to explain to you the meaning would do me little good, I fear."

Returned Quesada, somewhat disappointed, "You fear rightly, Frenchman!"

He made a slight gesture of the hand. Two of his dorados seized the Frenchman and proceeded to subject him to a rough overhauling. The Frenchman grimaced with impotent rage and, narrowing his naturally small calculating eyes, watched the searchers' every move with covert anxiety.

Brusque, precipitant, hasty was that search. Very easily might it have been more studied and thorough. But a gold watch, a few Spanish gold and silver peseta pieces, two rings set with diamonds and an emerald scarfpin were taken from him before he was liberated by the searchers. The rings and the scarfpin were not plucked from his hands and necktie; they were found deep in his pockets where he had hidden them, thinking perhaps, to smuggle them past the bandoleros.

At that, the emerald scarfpin was but a very ordinary jimcrack and the diamonds of the two rings, though huge and pretentious, had the dishonest and glassy look of paste imitations. Though but simple Moors, even as they called themselves, the bandoleros were not so ingenuous as to be deceived by them; and they wondered greatly why he had concealed them with such pains. Remarked sarcastically one of the searchers, a certain Ignacio Garcia, addressing Quesada;

"The elegant French rooster has but a thinly lined crop, maestro!"

He grasped the Frenchman's elbow and swung him about-face. Then he gave him a shove toward the group already plucked and gutted, shouting harshly, "Away with you, you false jewel! Pronto!"

The Frenchman hastened to merge himself into the background. Once his face was turned away from the bandoleros, his pebbly eyes sparkled with profound relief; they sparkled with inconcealable joy; and he smiled a superior triumphant smile.

"Who comes next?" asked Jacinto Quesada, without much interest.

"The beautiful young wife of the Frenchman, maestro. She, with the mouth that is a nest for kisses!" And Rafael Perez pointed her out.

"And it please you, you may come forward, Senora Dona!" in a carefully softened voice called Pio Estrada, another of the searchers. Strange, but her youth and beauty and high hidalgo look had moved the man to a ruffian's attempt at courtesy and gentleness.

As she made to step forward, Jacinto Quesada turned his eyes upon the beautiful golden-haired girl and, for the first time, gave her a special and particular scrutiny.

"Hola!" he gasped. "What is this?"

He stepped forward a step, his eyelids narrowed, his eyes gleaming; and he shot toward her a second look, piercing, probing. It was as though he were shocked and aroused, puzzled and confounded.

While he looked eagerly and long at her, he muttered:

"What a resemblance! But no—it is not a resemblance. She is she herself!"

He moved slowly towards her as though drawn thence by an irresistible influence. Suddenly he called out a name!

"Felicidad!"

On the barren, windless plain to the right of the stalled carriages, they were all gathered, the bandoleros with their carbines, the travelers so like a herd of cattle in a *rodeo*. Those passengers, already searched and robbed, were in a separate group; they were sequestered from those not yet searched and made to deliver. No sound came across the everlasting flats but the low incessant chitter of the desert-loving wheatears, little fuzzy fat birds that live among the mimosa and the thorny acacia and the stunted ilex of that ugly and desolate Manchega veldt. Out from the main drove of passengers moved bravely the golden-haired girl. And then, a name was called, and the windless air became suddenly electric with drama.

The Frenchman's young wife moved forward, seemingly unaware of Jacinto Quesada's call, of his now devouring gaze. Well, suddenly and all on the moment, she turned about-face and started swiftly for the stalled train!

It was altogether unexpected. She was not the first of her sex to be singled out for the search; she had seen nuns and convent maids and even Gitanas treated by the bandoleros with a respect and courtesy that amounted almost to reverence;

and yet, at the last instant, alarm and trepidation had overcome her, it seemed. She was hysterical, perhaps; almost insane with terror.

Be that as it may, her unexpected and erratic performance caused an echoing panic to sweep over the other passengers. Even the bandoleros felt the contagion. Cursing excitedly, two of them started to pursue the golden-haired girl, while the third, Rafael Perez, standing near Quesada, raised his carbine and screamed hoarsely:

"Come back here, you outrageous minx!"

The crowd, momentarily free from the dread of the bandoleros, had commenced an insensate shouting and milling. Now, had Perez fired off the carbine, the whole hold-up might have ended then and there for the bandoleros in an inglorious headlong rout. The passengers, already out of thrall to the salteadores, would have risen in tumultuous, uncontrollable fury at this firing on a defenseless woman.

But Jacinto Quesada rose to the crisis and saved the situation. Excited though he was, he sprung toward Perez, tore the carbine from his hands and, pointing it at the crowd, shouted imperiously to his men:

"Back, you fools, to your stations! Guard these people. Shoot any that break away! And don't mind the girl! I'll bring her back—I, and no one else!"

Presto! and the bandoleros were back in their old positions, their carbines sweeping the crowd. The imminent danger of stampede was dissipated. The discipline of dread again prevailed.

Handing the carbine back to Perez, Jacinto Quesada started after the girl. She had fled without aim, without purpose, he thought, like a frightened doe that cares not where she flees so long as she flees from the huntsmen. Her panicky flight would do little good, however; a sort of trap was the stalled train, not a refuge and sanctuary.

The girl was just about to open the door of one of the third-class coaches and fling herself therein when, all at once, she cast back a look, first at her tall blond mustached husband, then at Quesada. Strangely, her glances seemed to have become preposterously mixed. It was a look of dread and loathing she threw back toward her husband; and a look of entreaty and beseeching she sent toward the pursuing bandolero!

With his long mountaineer's legs, Jacinto Quesada sprinted to the train. Hardly had the door of the third-class carriage closed behind the golden-haired girl than he was at that door. Open he flung it and in he burst.

"Felicidad! Felicidad, *querida mia,* my darling! It is I, Jacinto—Jacinto Quesada! You have naught to fear from me. And if you had told me that he, the Frenchman, was your husband, I would not have robbed him. Porvida! everything taken already shall be given him back. And as for you, dear Felicidad—"

She had backed herself against the door opposite. Now she came forward swiftly, her face paling and flushing, her lip a-quiver. It was not as though she were glad with sudden recognition: it

was as though she were terribly agitated by some deadly fear. She said, in a dry expressionless tone:

"I heard your name mentioned by some passenger as we were bundled from the train, Jacinto, and ah! how grateful to God I was when I first saw you, almost half an hour ago, standing among those ruffianly ladrones! I remembered the time you saved me from my father's quirta—and I needed you so much more, now!

"All this long, long afternoon I prayed that something would happen—anything, anything! God of my soul! how I prayed! But even after I discovered you and realized that, for our childhood's sake, you would protect me, it took all my courage and strength to flee from the crowd and conceal myself here, where I could speak to you and not be spied upon or suspected by that evil, that terrible man!"

Almost in a whisper were her words spoken, but they crashed upon Jacinto Quesada's brain like exploding, detonating shells. He reeled back, overwhelmed, staggered, knocked all to pieces. He gasped:

"Por los Clavos de Cristo! what is all this?"

"Ah, *Maria purissima!* He does not understand! But all, I shall tell him!"—and swiftly, precipitantly, the girl went on:

"This Frenchman. He calls himself Jacques Ferou. He was the only one that was kind to me and even until two hours ago, I thought I loved him. We were to be married in Madrid to-night—but now—"

"Then he is not already your husband! Carajo! I thought—"

"No; we but eloped this morning. And now, I would not continue on with him; I would turn back! I am afraid—afraid!"

"But tell me all from the beginning. Your words turn my brain to a stew!"

CHAPTER VII

JACINTO QUESADA had known Felicidad's father, Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada; he had lived in the great, cold, dingy house near Granada; he had tasted the secluded, lonely life of Felicidad. Therefore, she had but to say a few sketchy rapid sentences and he comprehended the beginning of everything.

"Of late years, my father has become gradually poorer, Jacinto," she said.

Quesada nodded his head understandingly. Don Jaime had never refused his physician's services to the poverty-stricken and wretched; and the poverty-stricken and wretched were always becoming sick; and the poverty-stricken and wretched seldom paid. Small wonder that Don Jaime's fortunes had fallen into decay!

"My father had no money put by to keep him in his old age; but he always said he would sell those old beloved books of his when he became incapacitated, by age, for a physician's arduous toils, or when bitter necessity pressed him hard. You must know, Jacinto, that father's ancient, yellow-leafed books are worth much, much money."

She went on to explain. Learned men, famous men—some of them scholarly descendants of noble families, others erudite plebeians with the right to affix a dozen initials after their names—were al-

ways coming to Don Jaime's house from the University of Salamanca and the Museo Provincial of Seville to examine those books and to write historical treatises and critiques from them. And it was not unusual to find one of these bookworms, these bibliophiles, these *hombres del todo aficionado á los libros,* making eager hints to purchase such of the precious dingy tomes as they considered within their means.

Some of the books had been possessed by Don Jaime's family for hundreds of years; others he had come by through his godfather who was a famous Spanish historian and very rich; and still others he had himself discovered when doctoring ruined hidalgo families and the monks of poverty-gutted monasteries; and he had taken these finds in place of monetary fees. Naturally enough, therefore, he hated to part with any of this great treasure in books.

Fearing an old age of stony poverty, however, Don Jaime at last made up his mind to put the books on sale. The money he might receive from marketing the books he planned to invest in Argentine bonds. Three months gone, he wrote to two great houses that deal in rare and valuable books; the one in London, the other in Paris.

Posthaste, two months since, came to the house outside Granada, the buyer for the London firm. In far-away cold London, they had heard of Don Jaime's collection, for there was not another collection of its like outside of Spain. For two weeks the London book-buyer lived in the casa with Don Jaime and Felicidad, cataloguing and pricing the

books. Some of the old quaint authors he rejected as of little worth, but others he called "glorious Golcondas" and offered Don Jaime such a sum for them that he was amazed, astounded. He had not expected to receive so much money for the whole aggregate and total of his collection.

"Three weeks ago, after paying my father a fortune in bank notes," continued the girl, "the English book-buyer, Senor Havelock Moore-Ingraham, went away, and with him, borne by a caravan of ten mules, went the cream and richness of my father's library.

"Then came to our house this Jacques Ferou. He said he had been sent by the Paris house to whom my father had written. My father told him that he was too late to bid, that all the books of value had been sold.

"At that Jacques Ferou became very downcast; he said that his firm would be much put out when they learned he had allowed the English company to bag the hares while he played the laggard. And he begged very earnestly for permission to look through the books, which had not been purchased, in the hope that the English agent had overlooked a few volumes of value, volumes that he might buy in order to save his face."

Don Jaime gave him permission so to do. For almost a month he lived in the great dusky lonely house. When he was not in the library poring over the yellowed tomes, he wandered through the house, seeking sight of Felicidad. When she had her daily "hour of balcony", he would leave the casa and stand watching her from across the road, "playing the

bear" in a very serious and devoted manner.

"I had never had a *novio* before," explained Felicidad, "and his eyes were so kind and sympathetic! It was very lonely in the great house with just my father and the old whining Pedro and the old childish Teresa. And he treated me with such consideration and reverence!

"We used to meet often in the long dusky corridors, he kissing my hands and telling me how beautiful I was, and I liking it, yet feeling fear of him and all a-tremble, besides, lest my father discover us. And at dinner time and all through the evenings, there he would be again, talking with my father about 'rogue novels' and the chroniclers of the conquistadores, and ever looking at me with the burning eyes of love.

"Two days ago, my father spoke very harshly to me, threatening me with a beating—he beats me even yet, you know. Old Pedro had told him that I had a novio—that was why he was angered at me. But he did not as yet suspect that my lover was Jacques Ferou.

"Jacques was to leave our house for Paris in another week. I could not resign myself to the old loneliness in that empty gloomy house; and I would not suffer even one more time the indignity of a beating at my father's hands. So two days ago I consented to run off with Jacques Ferou and become his wife.

"At four o'clock this morning, when it was still dark, I left my bed, dressed, put a few things together, and went out on my balcony. Jacques was waiting for me. He threw up a rope and I tied

it to the iron railing and let myself down into his arms.

"Down the road a high-powered automobile awaited us. In it we raced precipitantly away, for as you very well know, we had the outraged pride of my terrible father to fear. Before seven o'clock in the morning, we had fled almost as far as Jaen. Then something went wrong with the automobile and it would go no farther; whereupon, Jacques sent a *labrador* into Jaen, who soon came back escorting a diligence pulled by four horses. In the diligence we set off for Castro which is on the railroad to Madrid. It was two hours before noon when we reached Castro, and the train came at noon."

They were on the Seville-to-Madrid that afternoon, when suddenly Felicidad thought:

"Has Jacques forgotten that he came to my father's house to purchase books—has he forgotten his matter-of-fact business in his overmastering love for me? He has neither paid my father for those books he selected, nor taken those books he selected away with him.

"I questioned Jacques. He laughed. He told me not to worry about his business affairs. But I continued to worry; I felt already a wife's interest and pride in my future husband's career; and I was much afraid that his employers in Paris would be angered by his careless handling of the whole transaction.

"When Jacques saw that I was still put out about him, he laughed again, this time heartily and long. Then suddenly he stopped laughing and, looking hard into my eyes, said in a cold, challenging voice:

" 'Suppose I should tell you, *ma chérie,* that I am not in the employ of a Paris book house; that my business is not at all that of a purchaser of rare books; and that I care for rare books not a snap of the fingers!' "

Felicidad was thunderstruck and a little stunned. He saw the shocked expression on her face and thereat commenced, with a cruel malicious delight, to tell her other things.

He had been to the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile; he had been to Egypt, Italy, England, and Sweden. He had been to Spain more than a dozen times before. He had had many adventures. But, strangely, these adventures were all adventures in crime. He had robbed cathedrals in France and Spain of their valuable paintings and jewels and even of their statuary. He had robbed museums and private collections of the New World.

He seemed to swell with pride, to grow with importance as he bared his real self thus to her. With snobbish care, he explained to her how far superior to ordinary criminals he was; he defined himself as one of a limited and ultra-clever aristocracy of thieves. It was as though he were showing a noble and praiseworthy side of himself hitherto unrevealed; it was as though he had wooed a peasant girl, while disguised in a most humble attire, and now lifted his vagabond's ragged cap to reveal a prince's crown. He said he was a member of the "White Wolves", an organization of French criminals who stole mostly from churches. He said he was a member of many other exclusive criminal fraternities.

When from the lips of Felicidad, Jacinto Quesada heard this last, he ejaculated:

"Carajo! So that was why, before we searched him, he made such queer signs to me—he was using thieves' signs, the signals of those criminal brotherhoods to which he belongs. He thought I, as another thief, might have some knowledge of that language of signs and that, out of a thief's respect for a thief, I might exempt him from the ordeal of the search!"

"Of what do you speak now—what signs?" asked Felicidad, bewildered.

Jacinto Quesada explained. Then he said, "Proceed with your story, dear Felicidad."

Continuing, therefore, Felicidad told how Jacques Ferou, intent on showing how consummately clever he was at all criminal business, and not averse to filling his young wife with awe and fear of him, led up at last to the business that had brought him to Spain and to the house of Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada.

Once upon a time, he had indeed worked for the Paris book house whose card he had used to introduce himself to the haughty hidalgo. He had been hired by a very rich and very crazy bibliophile to get feloniously, as it was beyond even the bibliomaniac's purse, a certain precious book in the possession of the Paris firm; and the better to steal the ancient volume, he had hired himself as a clerk to them for three months.

Through another clerk still in their employ—a hunchbacked fellow whom he had picked out, with a criminal's sure instinct, as a weakling inclined

to dishonesty and crime of a sort—he had secured Don Jaime's letter offering the books for sale, before any one but his ally and friend, the hunchback, had a chance to see it.

Now, he knew a little about rare books; so he practiced talking about books like a bibliophile and buyer; and very shortly, he started for Spain. But he traveled slowly for a certain reason.

When he told her this last, Felicidad asked him:

"But for what reason did you travel slowly?"

Jacques Ferou looked at Felicidad in a pity that, perhaps, amounted to a contempt.

"Why, you silly baby!" laughed he. "After all I have said, don't you know why it was I traveled all the way from Paris to your father's house in Andalusia?"

"No!"

At that, laughing the louder, he opened the top of his vest and put his hand down beneath his shirt and undershirt. Presently, from under his armpit, he drew out a small, mahogany-colored leather purse and let Felicidad look into it. Within was a roll of bills, tightly wound and compressed so that they took up but little space. Felicidad gasped with fright and horror when she saw the color of the top bank note. It was a bank note on the Bank of Spain for five thousand pesetas! Her father, the terrible Don Jaime, had been paid by the English book-buyer in five-thousand peseta bills!

But Jacques Ferou was saying:

"You know, your father mentioned offering the

books to the English firm when he wrote that letter to Paris. Therefore, I delayed my journey to Spain so that I should not reach your father's house until the English book-buyer had paid over the money for the purchased books and had left with his purchases. Ma chérie, I came to Spain, not for books, but for this. This is the money paid to your father for his books!" And he held up the small mahogany-colored leather purse that had been Felicidad's father's.

Sometime since, when with cruel, malicious delight he had started to tell her of his criminal operations, Felicidad had drawn away from him in horror. Now she started up, crying out in supreme contempt:

"So you stole all the money that was to keep my father in his old age! Oh, you—you disgusting thief!"

He saw then that he had been too open, too bold, too braggard. He tried to quiet and soothe her with caressing hands, with kisses. But her lips had become cold as ice, and they shrank away from his in profound loathing.

They were alone in the regulation separated continental coach. She tried to tear herself from his arms and to throw herself from the moving train. Death was all she thought of at first. By allowing herself to be cajoled into running off with a creature who had no more decency than to rob the father of his all, while he stole from him also his only daughter, she had disgraced the high name of Torreblanca y Moncada. What a blow this would be at the pride of the eagle-haughty Don Jaime!

He had never forgiven her mother for her desertion. Of a surety, never would he forgive Felicidad!

But even as Felicidad despaired and thought of death, there had come to her the protector of her childhood days, Jacinto Quesada. And to him she now appealed, saying with the ferocity of desperation:

"The leather purse is still strapped under his armpit next his skin! Go quickly and take it from him! You should have found it in the search; then I would not have had to do as I have since done. That purse contains the happiness of my father's old age. Tear it from that yellow-livered Frenchman and return it in some way to Don Jaime!"

With nervous eager hands she sought to hurry Jacinto Quesada from the carriage. But he did not think to resist her, so glad was he to turn from talk to action. Then, as he dashed impetuously away, she said in a half-whisper, her voice breaking with sobs:

"If God has intended that I should live on as the wife of a criminal, I will suffer my fate in silence and patience, knowing that I, in my waywardness, am alone to blame. But my father shall not be robbed of his *buena ventura*—he shall not end his days in want and misery. Seguramente, no! *Dios de mialma,* no!

"I have dishonored Don Jaime—and Don Jaime most certainly will kill me if ever he sets eyes on me again—but *no lo quiera Dios!* that I should suffer this obscene crime against him to be committed!

There is blood and pride in me yet—I am yet a Torreblanca y Moncada!"

Half-way to the muster of people, Jacinto Quesada halted to throw back to her a heartening look and to call:

"*Despacio!* Softly!—gently! And watch, my Felicidad, how easy it is to rob the robber!"

CHAPTER VIII

HIGH overhead a bustard sailed on slow, lazy pinions, but below, across the flat, tawny Manchegan plain, not a gust of desert dust whirled, not a buck-rabbit bounded, not a cow or bullock lumbered. Hot and large, empty and silent was the slow-crawling afternoon.

Jacinto Quesada faced the herded people. He had been gone five minutes; now, in visible trepidation, they awaited the upshot of his return. Their eyes adhered stickily to his; they were utterly without voice. Suddenly, he called, "Bring up and search the Frenchman again!"

Dios hombre! but the thing was swiftly done. The Frenchman's protests went for nothing; he was mauled about, roughed and ruffed, fine-combed and intimately worked over. Jacinto Quesada himself was lead-hound in the second search. He it was who drew forth the small, mahogany-colored leather purse from its nook of concealment in the fellow's armpit.

Looking black as thunder, Jacques Ferou retreated once again into the background of people. There situated, he gave vent freely to his exasperation and fury, muttering savagely: "Name of a name of a name of a name of a dog!" Also, many other choice French curses. But the more he cursed, the more acrimonious and virulent he be-

came. His face went livid with stirred-up bile; his slate-colored eyes snapped in bitter resentment; he bared his long white teeth in a passionate carnivorous snarl of envenomed hate.

But hate for whom? At first his hate was directed against no one in particular. Because he had lost the purse, life had suddenly changed to a more somber color and bitterly he detested the whole world!

Then he turned his eyes upon Jacinto Quesada, thinking, for obvious reasons, to concentrate his spleen upon him. Jacinto Quesada caught the Frenchman's burning look and smiled contemptuously. That contemptuous smile should have infuriated the Frenchman all the more; but strangely, it did not! Somehow the Frenchman sensed that Jacinto Quesada was not the prime mover in his downfall; and, his hate still at a loss for a target to direct itself against, he took his eyes altogether off the youthful bandolero.

Then *Sacre Bleu!* who was that he glimpsed out of the ends of his irises? Was it not Felicidad, his promised wife? She had made an inconspicuous, an almost clandestine exit, from the third-class coach wherein she had hid herself; and now she was furtively seeking to rejoin the muster of people. Watching her, the Frenchman saw plainly that she it was who had betrayed him to the bandoleros. And his whole malignant rancid soul bunched and crouched in his eyes, and threw toward her a look searing and scalding, a look of vitriolic vindictiveness.

Ever since Felicidad had pushed him with im-

petuosity and precipitation from the third-class coach, telling him to go quickly and tear from the Frenchman the purse, Jacinto Quesada had been dominated by the will of the girl, doing swiftly and with utter obedience that which she had bade him do. He had worked in a white vacuum of action, without prejudice or plan of his own, without forethought. Never did he doubt but that once the mahogany-hued purse was taken from the Frenchman the whole wrong would automatically right itself. And now—what should he do with the purse? It would be some time before he could plan ways and means to return it safely to Don Jaime.

Of a sudden, then, to make matters more perplexing, Jacinto discovered the Frenchman looking at Felicidad in that ugly and ominous way. At that, he ceased worrying about the mahogany-colored purse; he shoved it into an inside pocket of his sheepskin zamarra and straightway forgot it. The question of its disposal was an insignificant matter; a greater question bothered him. What should he do with the girl?

As one wrestler closes with another, Jacinto Quesada closed with that great question. The while he gripped and folded it in the doughy coils of his brains, however, he did not stand quiet and pensive. Enough time already had been lost. Loudly Quesada shouted orders.

One of his supernumeraries, Pio Estrada, dipped down into the dry gutter of the Arroyo Seco for the horses. The others, Rafael Perez and Ignacio Garcia, fell to prodding the herded passengers with their carbines back upon the train. Instantly the

whole panorama took on a brisker look. At haphazard, into any of the coaches which presented themselves, plunged those boarding the train, not caring in what style they rode, or what comfort, so long as they soon speeded away.

Pio Estrada reappeared, leading by their bridles three hairy Manchegan ponies. Another galvanic command from Quesada and, from the work of bundling the passengers aboard the train, hurriedly the other two salteadores detached themselves. They bustled about their ponies, roping upon them the weighty sacks of mail and conglomerate loot, looking to their curved bits and cinch-straps. With dispatch, everything was being prepared for a nimble get-away.

The last of the waylaid passengers were crowding back into the train, the engine driver and his stoker were high in their cab once more and busily engaged in getting up steam. It needed only the word of Quesada, and the Manchegan ponies would be mounted, the train released on its way, and the hold-up of the Seville-to-Madrid consummated.

Still dodging the great question of the disposal of the girl, sparring for time, Jacinto Quesada stole a look toward where he last had seen Felicidad. He started and scowled. She and the Frenchman were together. They were among those few not yet distributed through the various coaches.

As the laggards milled and pushed along the line of opening and closing doors, along the line of compartments crowded and jammed, the Frenchman, Jacques Ferou, had sidled near her. He had caught her by the arm. Now, his tall athletic body

bent forward sharply, his calculating eyes narrowed to mere blazing slits, the nostrils of his high predatory nose twitching and working, his whole ashy face working and grimacing like a horrible mask of rubber, he was whispering into her ear!

There was no mistaking the active threat in the man's attitude; there was no mistaking the real and terrible fear in the girl's cowering pose. She made to put up her hands as if to ward off blows; she trembled like a tag of paper hung in the wind; and suddenly the cry that had chilled in her throat at his first touch, burst up through the walls of her lungs, and shrilled out in a terrified wail.

Jacinto Quesada leaped, as though lashed, toward the two. The lumpy problem was smashed, by that cry, into smithereens. The great question demanded action. There was but one kind of action to do.

Rafael Perez bulked up before him.

"Give the word, maestro," said he, "and we shall signal the engineer to start the train."

"The word is given, then!"

Rafael Perez made a semaphore of his arms. Another salteador farther up the track repeated and relayed the signal. The locomotive whistle shrilled shortly once, then the bell clanged and clanged with warning insistence.

As Quesada flung past Rafael Perez, he threw out the words:

"Tell Garcia and Estrada to mount and make ready to start away, the moment I give the command. You wait to hold my pony for me. As

was the plan, my pony goes unburdened by any of the sacks of stuff; but, though it was also the plan, I will not linger behind to cover the get-away. I have a new worry to trouble me. You lagartos will have to look to your own safety. Should we get separated, you know the pass in the mountains where we have planned to meet. Am I understood?"

"Si, maestro!"

With the emission of the waste steam through the chimney, the engine of the Seville-to-Madrid commenced puffing slowly; the cars began shuddering and groaning as though about to start. Jacques Ferou held open the door of a second-class coach for Felicidad. But it was already packed full of men and she hesitated to enter.

"Come, hurry!" roughly ordered the Frenchman. "The train in another minute will start. You do not wish to be left behind, do you?"

"But this is not our coach! The coach we rode in thus far is up forward." Almost it seemed as if the girl were sparring for time.

"Enter, it is *no importa, señora dona!*" said, with kindness, one of the men within—a man in a yellow bullfighter's costume, one of the picadores of Morales' cuadrilla.

"Yes, enter, please," spoke up another in a green costume, the great Morales himself. "You are most welcome here, I assure you!" And he reached down, seeking to help her climb aboard.

"Quick, or the train will start without you!" cried another, the blue-eyed American. Then in English, for suddenly the train had commenced to bang back

and forth, and he had become beside himself with excitement:

"Make haste, girl! The accursed slow freight is about to move. Gad! here it goes."

Just as the train puffed rapidly and, with a roar and a tremendous yank started off, he crowded between the knees of the cuadrilla of bullfighters, pushed aside Morales, and leaped through the door. Staggering from the precipitant leap, he made toward the girl, intending to lift and fling her into the moving train.

A man came between them.

"What do you do here?" cried this man sharply. "Back, into the coach!"

The American recognized Jacinto Quesada. He tried to fling past him. A huge long-barreled revolver showed in the bandolero's hand.

"Back, you, into your coach!" cried Quesada once again. "And you, you dog of a Frenchman! Quick! enter! or I will shoot you through the fat of your breeches!"

Swiftly the Frenchman went. He dashed after the moving coach, caught up with it and flung himself headlong in upon the floor. Then he pulled himself to his feet again, went over to the open door, and banged it shut.

The American did not budge.

"But the girl!" he shouted. He drove at the bandolero. Quesada dodged his fist. He reversed the revolver in his hand and swiftly crashed it butt-first down upon the American's forehead.

The American reeled back, stunned, falling. Quesada looked down the length of train moving

up toward him; he saw another open-doored coach rattling near. Suddenly stooping, he tackled at the legs of the American, lifted him bodily into the air, and flung him back upon the floor of the open, moving coach. The American never knew how he boarded that train no more than he would had he been a soulless sack of barley!

All over sweat and panting deeply, Jacinto Quesada turned to Felicidad.

"Come; I must take you with me," he said to her, "to my mother in Minas de la Sierra. We will send back the purse to your father. We will tell him the true story of events. Depend upon it, my Felicidad, he will forgive you, he will relent. Until he does that, however, my mother will take care of you, and I will be your guardian angel, besides." He could not prevent a smile. And he added, "A sinful and thieving sort of guardian angel, but one strong to protect you, you may be sure of that! Come! Up on my horse!"

He swung her up upon his Manchegan pony. Before her, he mounted. He dug his heels in the pony's sleek mouse-colored barrel. They started away.

"Hold tight with your little hands, my Felicidad!" he remarked. "It will be fast riding for quite awhile."

"Ah, thankfully I go with you, Jacinto!" she said, after a little, despite the unevenness and hardship of their fast pace. "Jacques Ferou whispered to me that he would show me, once we got to Madrid, how the Apaches, the depraved criminals of Paris, treat those women who to them are unfaithful!"

CHAPTER IX

AFTER lumbering slowly across the rickety Arroyo Seco bridge, the Seville-to-Madrid swung eastward on its gleaming rails and pursued, across the desert uplands, a course parallel to that of the bandoleros. From the coach windows on one side, the passengers could see Rafael Perez, Ignacio Garcia, and Pio Estrada fleeing across the parched and tawny flat on their plunder-laden, loping Manchegan ponies. They were speeding for the distant gray and purple mountains.

A jump behind these worthies and rapidly overtaking them were Jacinto Quesada and the golden-haired girl. Distinctly the passengers could make out Felicidad and her kidnaper. And the sight was as a red muleta to a Miura bull.

A young bride stolen from her husband! A young girl abducted by highwaymen! That was she behind the last of the retreating bandoleros—see the flying green skirt, see the glint of her golden hair in the sun! They were taking her off with them, carrying her away into the savage mountains! Had there been no men among all those creatures in trousers scattered throughout the train—no men to rise in their masculinity and to sacrifice their lives if need be, but at all hazards to prevent this abominable crime?

Women screamed, and women prayed. Hideous visions rose before their eyes; visions of the ban-

doleros in some craggy retreat shaking dice for possession of the girl! One of the black-clad nuns fainted outright.

On its gleaming rails, the Seville-to-Madrid swerved once again. With distance, the fleeing horsemen grew small, smaller. They were little as bounding rabbits; then they were little as low-skimming birds. And then at last they lost themselves in the ocean of ilex and thorny acacia, the dun immensity of sand.

The Seville-to-Madrid had been under way for a full twenty minutes and was nearing the steel cantilever bridge over the river Zancura, when a man, lurching heavily and looking very sick, picked his steps slowly and cautiously along the footboard on the right side of the train—that footboard used by the train guards in going from compartment to compartment of the many-coached continental-style caravan, collecting tickets and locking the doors between stops. The man clung to door knobs, window jambs and window sills. And gradually he worked forward along half the length of the train.

At last he had progressed to a second-class coach that resounded with the voices of indignant and outraged men, that quivered and rang with bass and baritone curses in both Spanish and French. When he had closed in upon this coach, the man on the footboard smiled triumphantly, yanked open the door, and flung himself within.

For a space, it was not as though he had entered a crowded coach; it was as though he had flung himself into a surf of rolling breakers. Masses of words struck him with the velocity and flying

weight of charging masses of water. He spread his feet, braced his shoulders and chest to the impacting masses of words, and waited.

The pounding tumulting seas crashed over him; he held his footing; they receded, drew back, ebbed away. Then, before the great *zipizape* of words could recommence, he held up his hands for silence. Silence was given him. He said:

"I am a Norte Americano, a Yanqui. In my country if a girl were kidnaped by bandits, quite well I know what we Yanquis would do. But this is Spain, not the United States. What are you Spaniards going to do?"

"What can we do, Senor Americano?" asked one of the cuadrilla of bullfighters, a banderillero by his dress. "We ask you that—what can we do?"

"Do not think it an everyday thing," spoke up the matador, Morales, "for blossoming girls to be stolen by Spanish highwaymen and carried off into the mountains. One reads about such happenings in the bizarre and romantic novels of the elder Dumas; but one does not think to see such things occur in real life.

"You would search far in our country's history for a parallel to this outrageous crime! José Maria, Diego Corrientes, Agua-Dulce and Visco el Borje left our women severely alone. They were simple-souled men of the people, risen against oppression. Even as would any humble and pious and hard-working labrador, so these bandoleros en grande feared God and public opinion. Right well they knew they could continue to exist as outlaws only by reason of the favor of Spanish public opinion, not

to speak of the favor of God. And they set the fashion for future Spanish outlaws. They made the conventions by which all bandoleros are supposed to conduct themselves to-day. The bandoleros, just before this man Quesada, honored those conventions. El Vivillo and Pernales committed no crimes against Spanish women.

"Senor Americano, you may have noticed that we Spaniards accord our bandoleros a certain respect. Because they have been altogether masculine, varonil, and yet treated our womenkind with the utmost reverence, the bandoleros have wrung from us this esteem which amounts sometimes even to love.

"And even this Jacinto Quesada to-day! He treated me with great consideration, chatting pleasantly about his love of bullfighting and other very human things. And he struck me as being a bandolero of the splendid good old sort—the José Maria, the Visco el Borje sort! Why, he even asked after the health of my wife, Marta, and my two little ones! But now! To find out that he is a renegade, a damnable turncoat from the old bandolero code, an inhuman wretch, a despicable rapist—*Porvida!*"

Morales' boyishly rounded face flamed with anger and with a great deal more of shame.

"In my country," said the American, "should a man abduct a girl, a posse would be organized at once, the criminal pursued, brought to bay, and made to pay with his life for the crime. The posse would be composed of every rich man, poor man, beggar man and thief in the community, and it would never rest until its work was completely

done and the girl brought safely back to her promised husband."

Three of the bullfighters spoke up at once.

"A posse? We have never heard of that!"

"Well, I come from the western part of the United States, and if you ever had lived there for even a short time, you could not be so blissfully ignorant. When I say a posse I mean a *posse comitatus,* which is a lawyer's term for the citizens who may be summoned to assist an officer in enforcing the law. My father was a pioneer in the State of California; he made his start in Inyo County mines and his millions in Bakersfield oil wells; and many's the story he has told me of quickly formed posses and their rapid, sure work. We would be forming a posse of a sort, if we all agreed to go after this Jacinto Quesada and bring back the girl."

One of the two yellow-costumed picadores was on his feet, his swarthy face ruddy with agitation and strong emotion.

"Then, in the name of Spanish womanhood, let us do that!" he cried. "I, Coruncho Lopez, the most superb picador in Spain, volunteer to be one of the posse!"

"And I, Alfonso Robledo, a banderillero as great as any!"

"And I—"

Suddenly, those about to volunteer became tongue-tied; the whole cuadrilla of bullfighters looked sheepish and confused. The youthful matador, Manuel Morales, had stepped before them, on his face a cold and contemptuous scowl.

"You are the peones of my cuadrilla," he said brutally, "and I am your maestro. You will do exactly that which I order you to do and nothing else! But, perhaps, you have forgotten the strict laws of discipline of our profession?"

Shamefaced and abject, the whole cuadrilla replied at once, "Forgive us, maestro. We await your orders."

Morales seemed to feel better after that. With the easy magnificence of a matador and maestro, he turned to the American.

"Senor Americano," he said, "I have become a successful and renowned espada only after years of hard work and vigilant heed to the duties of my profession. And now that I am the great Morales, I am as much a slave to my fame as any of my peones is the slave to me. In his offices in Seville sits my manager, the Senor Don Arturo Guerra, signing contract after contract; and these contracts I must fulfill, or lose much money and much prestige with the *presidentes* of bull rings and with the *aficionados*. Therefore, I must be discreet, circumspect, and full of forethought.

"Senor Americano, these peones have no franchise to speak for themselves. They are but my thoughtless, irresponsible children. If I did not rule them with a hand of iron, they would be off on a thousand wild escapades in a month! But one of them, just now, said a very splendid thing. 'In the name of Spanish womanhood,' he said, 'let us form of ourselves a posse!'

"Carajo! I am discreet, circumspect, and full of forethought as the great Morales should be, but

my heart tells me those words are good words! My heart leaps with eagerness to be pursuing the despicable Jacinto Quesada in the name of Spanish womanhood!

"What are contracts! What is money! What is prestige, fame! Senor Americano, join out with me, and we will chase this scoundrel up and down the peninsula until we have bayed him down and brought back the girl! If you wish it, I will command my whole cuadrilla to come with us; but it is my own wish, that we two go alone and unencumbered. This same Jacinto Quesada who stole the girl called me one of the three bravest men in Spain. And he named himself as the second most brave man, and you as the third! Let us go then, we two brave men together! Two such as we are equal to a posse of a dozen common men!"

The blue-eyed American looked a little uncomfortable; he did not quite know how to take the matador's flamboyant words. But he answered, heartily enough:

"Sure I'll join out with you! My name is Carson—John Fremont Carson—and here's my hand on it! But better take the whole cuadrilla along with us. We two may be as wonderful as you say we are, but just the same, numbers count, and every man can do his little bit to get back the girl. And now—"

"In this posse I am included, too, of course!"

It was the Frenchman, Jacques Ferou. He, the one to all outward appearances most injured and aggrieved by Jacinto Quesada's outrageous conduct, had played little part in the proceedings up to this

moment. But now, his tone was very peremptory and harsh, and he looked as if he meant business.

"Of course!"

"Por los Clavos de Cristo! we can't leave you out!"

The American produced a pencil and notebook.

"And now," he said, "to arrange the details. There will be horses needed, and provisions and guides and—"

"It will be mules in the mountains," said one bullfighter.

"Manchegan ponies are cheap," said another.

"We will need Mausers and revolvers, too," said a third. "We cannot conduct a man-hunt without weapons."

"But how will we finance the expedition?" asked the practical Frenchman. "Myself, I have not a franc, what you call a peseta. And I have no means of replenishing my rifled pockets!"

"Ah, then, it is for me to finance the expedition!" cried the matador, Morales. "I will telegraph to Seville when we get off at the next stop, and so much money will be sent me by Don Arturo, my manager, that you will be surprised, astounded! It is just that I should do this—I and my bullfighters make up the bulk of this troop; I am the most rich of you all."

"I don't know about that," said the American dryly. "Please allow me to go halves with you."

"Ah, I had forgotten; you Americans are all as rich as Monte Cristo. You and I will share the expense, then. We get off at the next stop and make our start after this Jacinto Quesada, do we not?"

CHAPTER X

THE two were Spaniards. They wore the uniform of the Guardia Civil, and they rode hairy, vigorous little police ponies. They had been in the saddle since daybreak, persistently pushing southward. The cobs were dog-weary but as steady-paced as machines of clockwork; the men were hunched of shoulder, heavy-headed, their faces coated with a gray-brown powder of dust.

They drew rein atop a naked hummock in the immensity of sand and ilex and thorny acacia. At the hip of the younger and taller of the two was slung a pair of binoculars. The one, and then the other, trained these glasses upon the rolling, everlasting veldt and swept the horizon round, their scrutiny long, patient, and searching.

All the long morning and the longer, more dreary afternoon, they had seen upon the endless despoblado only half-wild cattle and half-wild asses, and an occasional high-soaring falcon or an ugly, three-foot-long eyed-lizard. And this time was not the first time they had paused to peer through the binoculars; they had paused often, and then continued on without remark. Now, however, as he put back the glasses in their leather sheath, the younger policeman rather bitterly said:

"There is no one abroad upon La Mancha. Not even a solitary salteador de camino hiding out from us of the Guardia Civil."

"Yet I tell you, Miguel—most surely are they out there somewhere!" returned his compañero, vehemently dissenting. "How could they have attained, so soon, to the Sierra Morena ahead—I ask you that!"

Touching their ponies with their barbed heels, they enterprised once more upon the long traverse. There was a terrible sun that day, a sun African in the ferocity of its passion. The sun glare tortured their eyes. It caused their lacquered three-cornered police hats, made of shiny patent leather, to reflect and flash like the mirrors of a heliograph. The men sweated until they were as dry as cinders and could sweat no more.

In the more subdued glare of the late afternoon, the two came at length to the brown rolling foothills toward which they had been making throughout the whole hideous day. The foothills billowed away, in undulations rising even higher and higher, until finally they became part of a distant and purple alpland of massive and lofty peaks—the exalted spires and crags of the Sierra Morena.

As their jaded ponies took doggedly the initial rise, the younger and taller of the two policemen —he called Miguel—drew from his breast a yellow paper on which was mimeographed a copy of a typewritten telegram. He commenced to read aloud.

The great Manuel Morales—his full cuadrilla—an American, the Senor Don John Fremont Carson, and a Frenchman, name unknown. It is especially important that you discover news of the American,

Carson; he is a millionaire and of high social position in his own country. Both the American Ambassador and the Bank of Spain desire to ascertain his whereabouts, his reason for carrying such a large sum of money upon his person, and his purpose in setting off into the wilderness. The Bank of Spain is also much interested in the well-being of Manuel Morales, for he also withdrew a large account by telegraph before disappearing from sight.

The nine men left the Seville-to-Madrid at Alcazar de San Juan, four days ago, secured horses and enough provisions to last them a week and, traveling together, rode southward towards the Sierra Morena. They were well-armed, having bought carbines and automatic pistols from the Jewish cacique of Alcazar, Dicenta. They told no one their errand. They took no guides.

You of the Guardia Civil, find them and give them escort. Report all information to me—Echegaray, *Ministro de Gobernacion.*

He looked up now, the young smooth-faced policeman who had been reading, and turned his handsome head to gaze back over the long monotony of purgatorial desert. It was the words, scribbled in ink in a strong hand and added like a postscript or annotation to the telegraphed instructions, which he went on to read aloud now:

They are somewhere in Ciudad Real or Jaen. The country they are traversing is lawless and sparsely-populated, a country infested with ladrones, among whom the most notable is the notorious Quesada.

Spain will never forgive us if any harm should come to the great Morales. And we must answer to the American Ambassador should this John Fremont Carson be not safeguarded. The Constabulary will please give its most careful attention to the search.—Alvarez, Captain-General of the Guardia Civil for the District.

Putting the yellow paper back in the breast of his tight blue jacket faced with red, the younger policeman, Miguel, rode on up the slope beside his companero—a squat, fiercely mustached and apelike fellow.

"Pascual," he asked presently, "would you know that magnificent one, Morales, should you meet him face to face—"

"Seguramente, yes! Have I not watched him murder a thousand bulls?"

Then, thoughtfully, the apelike one added:

"Once we chance upon their spoor, once we scent them from afar, it should be a most simple matter for us of the Guardia Civil to run down these fools-errant of Manuel Morales. We know these plains and foothills; they do not. And they are a large troop and must make a great to-do of noise and dust whenever they move about. It is not as though we seek a bandolero riding alone, friend Miguel. A bandolero riding alone is a very fox to catch!"

"Ah, that Jacinto Quesada!" ejaculated the other with boyish enthusiasm. "Is not he the crafty lizard, the sly tricky one? He has given us more work to do than any twenty other lawbreakers in Spain. If Morales and his fools-errant—as you

call them, Pascual—conceal their movements but half so well as does he, we will be chasing will-o'-the-wisps for the next hundred years! But, by the way, Pascual, could you describe Jacinto Quesada to me?"

The older man pondered.

"That is most difficult," he said at length, chewing in a ruminating manner one end of his black mustache. "He is of the Sierra Nevada, this Quesada; he is not a native of La Mancha. Few men hereabouts could describe him, I think; he does not go abroad much to fiestas and wedding feasts, since he took to the highroads, you know. And the few folk that have met him since he became a bandolero have been too frightened to note well what he looked like. But I have been told by a paisano of his, a serrano of the Sierra Nevada, that he looks very much like me, myself!"

That last was said with downright pride. The policeman, Pascual, did not even take trouble to conceal his vain pleasure in the thought, his flattered conceit in himself. He sat a little straighter in the saddle and, with self-conscious braggadocio, fingered his black mustache, looking about him fiercely the while.

He was squat, broadly uncouth of shoulder, prognathous jawed—an ugly apelike sort. There was something bestially predatory in the simian look of him which the black mustache rather heightened than detracted from. He did not resemble any of his immediate progenitors who had been men of Aragon and Guardias Civiles every one. More he resembled, perhaps, certain Miquelets and reclaimed

brigands from whose loins his line had originally sprung. He did not look at all like Jacinto Quesada!

The youthful Civil Guard eyed the apelike Pascual a moment, and then derisively laughed.

"That is strange," he said, with a sneer. "Certain Gypsies of my acquaintance have seen Quesada in the mountains and on the plains. Outlaws such as he often repair to the Gitanos when hard-pressed, you know; the Gypsies look upon them as blood-brothers, for the Gypsies are all thieves. And it is strange, Pascual, but these Gypsies of my acquaintance have told me that *I* was the living image of Jacinto Quesada. He is very young, they say, little more than a boy even, and he is tall and smooth-shaven and handsome, indeed, very much like me!"

Youthful, tall, smooth of face and very handsome was, indeed, that policeman called Miguel. He was lean, supple and gallant looking as a sword of Toledo.

"Fools and children tell the truth," returned the apelike Pascual, quoting an old Spanish proverb. Then, barbing it with a sting of his own making, he added: "But Gitanos, never!"

Surlily, he rode on ahead, the while the other slid down from his horse and ran in pursuit of his shiny leather police hat which was tumbling in a quick succession of flip-flops down the hill. He had knocked it from his own head inadvertently when, while talking, he had raised the binoculars to his eyes for another look back over La Mancha.

After a short erratic chase, Miguel retrieved his

recalcitrant headgear; but, strangely, he did not return immediately to the saddle. Instead, stooping low, he stood motionless near the place where he had picked up the hat, peering down as at a nugget of gold half hidden in the dust and grass. Then, becoming altogether inexplicable in his actions, he went scurrying off up the slope at a tangent, his body bent far forward, his head turned toward the ground, and his face sharp and pale with excitement and expectancy.

"Caspita!" he was heard by Pascual to mutter. "Caspita!"—"Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Every so often, he halted and stooped lower, crouching almost to the very ground. It was as though, each time, he discovered something of sober interest to him and paused to examine that something.

Pascual followed him with puzzled and astounded eyes. At last, as the curious performance persisted, he called out, *"Dios hombre!* what ails you, man?"

His face flushed, his eyes smiling with triumph, the youthful and handsome Miguel came back to the spot where he had started his mysterious shadow-dance up the hillside.

"Pascual Montara!" he called. "This way, quick!"

As the other trotted his pony over, he pointed a finger to the ground before him and said, "Do you see that which I see, Pascual?"

"Seguramente, yes."

"What is it, then?"

"Carajo, Miguel! it is only a handful of grass,

plucked and left in a tiny hillock by some one."

"Bueno! But who plucked it, then, and left it in a heap upon the ground?"

"Zut! How should I know? Who is it plucks grass, anyway?"

The young policeman seemed to take joy in the rôle of Grand Inquisitor. He smiled a superior smile and moved on a few feet, and then again halted.

"And this—what is this?" he demanded, pointing before him once more.

"You buffoon, you—what game are you playing with me? It is only another hillock of plucked grass, as any fool can see!"

"And this?" The Grand Inquisitor had moved on another couple of yards.

"I shall call it a mountain, an it please you better. The Devil take you and your little hills of grass, Miguel Alvarado!"

"And this?" Once again the policeman with the superior smile had moved on up the hillside. But this time he did not point at any hillock of dead herbage.

"That? Why, that is only a cross made by two sticks that have fallen by chance one upon the other."

"Which way does the longest arm point, Pascual?"

"Straight up and down the slope."

"Muy bueno! I have pointed out everything to you, then. Chew upon what you have seen, Spaniard!"

He returned to his horse, mounted and started on.

The apelike Pascual, his face a study in curiosity, drew alongside.

"You have asked me a lot of questions, Miguel Alvarado," he said, "Now I will thank you a thousand times if you will explain your great mystery away."

"Great mystery—za! It is only because you are a lunkhead that you perceive any great mystery here. There are Gitanos encamped in the hills ahead, that is all!"

"Did those hillocks of plucked grass spell out that for you?"

"Yes; and the crossed sticks, also. The hillocks and the crossed sticks are the Gypsies' trail—what they call their patteran. They leave them in their wake that their brethren, who have lagged behind, may be guided by them to the meeting-place."

"*Y pues?*" grunted Pascual. "Well, and what of that? It is a matter of no moment to me. But hola! why turn your horse to the right?"

"I am going to the camp of the Zincali. They may have word of these men we seek. Should they have seen Morales and the rest upon the plains, or even have heard of their presence abroad, they will tell me such news as they have by chance acquired. Do not come with me, Pascual Montara, if you do not wish to."

Now, it is against all orders and precedent for one of the Spanish constabulary to go where his fellow goes not; the men of the Guardia Civil hunt forever in braces. The apelike Pascual grumbled, but loyally he followed his arrogant and imperious camarada.

Their horses topped the rise and, suddenly taking heart, entered briskly a tiny *barranca* set transverse between the hilltops. It was only a long gully or dingle, but it was cool and reposeful with wild olive and algarroba trees, white buckthorn, holly and arbutus. Through gutters strewn with moss-overgrown boulders, edged with rhododendrons and overarched by oleanders, raced down the whole length of it a glad, loud-chattering run of water.

Sighing their delight, the two surprised and pleasured policemen rode under an' upstanding and ancient wild olive at its portal and plunged into the secret, beautiful place. Instantly a great flutter of butterflies of all sizes and colors lifted in spangled clouds about them.

"But the Gypsies may be a great way ahead in the hills!" grumbled Pascual filled with a hasty but mighty desire to linger in this barranca, smoking cigarettes and dreaming the moments away in the cool of some shady tree.

All on the moment, the youthful Miguel Alvarado was off his horse again. They were following a narrow, barely discernible trail up the canyon's deep long alley; along this trail he now ran, leading his pony by the bridle and looking ever to the left side. Soon he paused and looked back at Pascual Montara.

"The Gitanos have pitched their tents just beyond the first turn above," he announced.

"Hola! Have you seen more of their sign writing in grass-ricks and sticks?"

"Si, Pascual. Look well at the forked rod set upright in the soft loam to the left of the trail—

one prong is broken off, the other points to the right. I knew, if it was here, it would be found to the left of the trail. It is a signpost only set up to guide night travelers. The Gitanos erected it here no more than an hour, or an hour and a half ago."

Pascual grunted noncommittally. But the younger man seemed possessed of a strange and febrile excitement.

"Let us bathe our faces and heads in the runlet," he suggested urgently. "It would be an error of strategy if we failed to look as gallant as possible when we ride into the camp of the Zincali. Besides, the Gypsy girls may not be overclean themselves, Pascual, but greatly they admire a Busno—a White-blood—with a face freshly laved and as handsome as yours or mine!"

"Za! The Gypsy wenches are all jades and strumpets!"

But he went, this surly Pascual Montara, and bathed his head in the brook. Puffing prodigiously, he mounted and rode on beside the other. Miguel Alvarado looked altogether the gay and haughty cavalier after his ablutions. Pascual could not help eyeing in admiration his camarada's lean, clean-cut youthful profile, his smooth, brown, handsome face. Alvarado's cheeks were tinged with red, his eyes bright and sparkling as though with some concealed but hopeful expectancy.

"You bristle with eagerness, senor caballero of my soul!" remarked Pascual slyly.

Miguel Alvarado shrugged his shoulders, but did not answer. Suspicion growing in his glance, the

apelike one continued to eye him. Then, as if he were accusing his camarada of something rather to be ashamed of, he said pointedly:

"It is because Gypsies are so near, that you burn and bristle—is it not? You are enamored of them; they captivate you with their uncouth glamors; towards them you are drawn, eh?

"Ah, I understand now, Miguel, that which heretofore has made you seem mysterious in my eyes—your trick of reading cabalistic signs written in chalk on the stonework of bridges and the adobe of posadas and *providencias;* your trick of reading hillocks of grass and crosses of sticks placed beside the road; and your trick, too, of ordering your pony about in the thieves' Latin of the Gitanos. You are like so many other Moors of Andalusia, Miguel Alvarado. You are one of *Los del Aficion*—Those of the Predilection! I have guessed rightly, have I not?"

Miguel Alvarado shrugged his shoulders once again, and smiled his superior smile. Lightly, he remarked, "The Gypsy wenches are like sheleopards, soft and caressing of movement, but free and bold of eye. I cannot resist the lure in their golden glances."

The other snorted and spat disgustedly down into the watercourse. He drew a little away from Miguel Alvarado. After that, he rode on, through the gathering dusk, very much in the manner of a man companioned by one possessed of a demon—full of a certain respect but also full of reserve and caution. Scarcely could you say he became more at his ease, more the boon companero and dorado.

Was not the man he rode with one of Those of the Predilection?

In Spain, especially in Andalusia, there has long existed a large class of men given over utterly to a zest for Gitanos, their ways of life, their dances and their songs. These admirers of the Gypsies cannot shake off the fascination; they follow after the wandering Roms like the slaves of an evil eye; they cultivate the Cales, the Black Men of Zend, wherever met; they delight to watch the strange obscene dances of the Gypsy maids that are like nothing so much as writhings of snakes in an ecstasy of desire. These men are Those of the Predilection.

In the hushed and golden gloaming, they came at last, those two of the Guardia Civil, to a turning of the narrow canyon and then, beyond, to a Gypsy camp set in an opening among the trees. The brown tents were patched with rags of a hundred hues, and strings of rags, slovenly washed and as variegated, hung drooping and gathering smoke between the ridgepoles and the trees.

There were seven dusty dun wagons in a wide circle, and great huddles of gaunt and hungry dogs lazying about, and horses, foals, and burros coming and going at will among the trees. From the limbs of the trees dangled all manner of saddles, traces, and other odds and ends of harness. There were three fires sending black smoke and dancing sparks up into the lines of washing and the overarching greenery; and there were a dozen men and women, and three times that many children, postured about the fires and beneath the wagons.

"Alto à la Guardia Civil!" bellowed thunderously

Pascual Montara, thinking to give the Gypsies a start with this dread call of the police.

The men about the fires did not move. The golden-skinned sloe-eyed women, stooped above the pots and kettles, looked up idly. Only the rabble of children seemed affrighted; they scurried away, those tousle-headed, chocolate-brown, ragged brats, some of even five and six years old stark naked, and hid themselves in the black insides of the wagons.

A young man, his shirt open to the waist, a yellow *faja* or scarf wound about his middle, was busily engaged with winding a battered accordion. It was outlandishly sweet under his hands. Nearby, a Gypsy woman of seventeen nursed a new-born bantling, her breast uncovered. A slim young girl leaned against the trunk of an algarroba, pensively brushing the calf of one nut-brown leg with the toes of the other. A man, tall, massive and nobly upright of port, got up from beside one of the fires and advanced slowly toward the two policemen on the edge of the clearing.

A red kerchief tightly bound his head, and he wore the leather slop of a blacksmith. He had a short, curly grizzled beard. What with his gigantic body, herculean shoulders, monolithic throat, and haughty, savagely beautiful head, he looked like some Byzantine emperor of the old Roman strain. He was sixty, but he had every appearance of being under forty-eight.

Even as the colossal one approached, Miguel Alvarado caught sight of the slim young nut-brown girl under the algarroba tree. He went deathly pale. He clutched at his throat, devouring her with

his gaze. His eyes were like two hot pulsing embers.

"Go forward to meet this man, Pascual Montara," at length he stuttered. "His name is Pepe Flammenca. He is a Gypsy count and lords it over the clan encamped here. Find out what he knows of Morales and the others. Question him shrewdly; he may know much!"

Without realizing that Miguel Alvarado was not to follow, Pascual pressed forward obediently. Meanwhile, the other policeman turned his horse in between the trees, skirted the clearing, and approached the spot where the Gypsy girl stood.

CHAPTER XI

DISMOUNTING, Miguel Alvarado stepped swiftly to the girl's side, threw his arms about her shoulder and waist, and drew her back among the trees and out of sight of those about the fires. She did not scream; she did not seem affrighted in the least. Only when he strove to kiss her, she put a slow but determined hand upon his forehead and pushed away his impetuous lips.

He forebore to combat her for that which she would not give. Crushing her to him, he whispered triumphantly, "Ah, my Paquita, maiden of my soul! Did I not say rightly, when I said we should meet again?"

Evidently she had not been quite certain whom he was until he spoke. For now, she writhed free from his arms, her face contorted with loathing and wrath.

"So you come sweethearting again, you vile louse of a Busno! Si, seguramente, si—we meet again! But I met with hunger when I was a child, and I met hunger often since, and I like hunger the less at each of our meetings. The same with the cholera! The same with you!"

A cold and haughty tower of ivory, she faced him. Her face was superbly royal with high disdain.

"Go away at once or I will set our scavenger curs on you! Have I not warned you before this never to approach me with your treacle words of love,

your kissing lips that turn my blood to vinegar, your caressing arms that make my skin shudder and creep? Go away, you itch, you ringworm! You are not a man; there is nothing masculine, varonil, strong and savage about you. All you can do is to moon and coo and sigh; you are a sot ever thirsty for love; you are a soft, shapeless blubber of passion! And how can you come near me when you know you are one of the order of men who murdered my brother for poisoning a few poor pigs and for stealing a few poor horses?—you, a man of the Guardia Civil, the enemy of my clan and race since time out of mind; our blight, our scourge!"

Beneath the bite and lash of her words, beneath the scorching fire of her scorn-filled eyes, a lesser man than Miguel Alvarado would have shriveled into a smoking black cinder. But never he. Folding his arms across his chest, he waited in a dramatic silence while the wrack and tempest swept over him. Then, slowly, theatrically, he raised his arms above his head, and uplifted his eyes, and addressed himself to the serene heavens—under the circumstances, the obvious and altogether Spanish thing to do.

"Senor Don Dios!" he apostrophized solemnly. "My soul leaps like a flame with love for her—I love her unto death. And she repulses me! What shall I do?"

Go away and leave her victorious in her disdain? Not Miguel Alvarado!

When Pascual Montara finished questioning the Gypsy chieftain and hetman, and came seeking his companero through the trees, he found them

together still—the hot-blooded young policeman and the lithe Paquita of the nut-brown legs. Miguel Alvarado had progressed some way with his bitterly contested love-making. But she still shrugged away from him when impetuously he approached too close.

Having left his horse in a distant quarter of the clearing, on foot through the gloaming came Pascual Montara; and, glimpsing the girl in the shadow of the trees, he halted dead and eyed her with wonder and admiration. She wore a printed calico dress of deep vermilions and flaming saffrons, and a grass-green scarf was wound, in the Gypsy fashion, among her ink-black tresses. There was a string of copper coins upon her bosom and a bangle of copper coins upon one wrist. Her dress came but little more than half-way down her bare, symmetrical and richly polished legs, and it was open at the throat to show glimpses of her small brown breasts and of the swale between.

Letting Miguel Alvarado talk as he willed, she stood watching him out of slow gloomy eyes. His elocution was fluent, full of zest, soul-moving; his words were gorgeous, magnificent, glowing with color and music. One moment he called her a baggage, a jade, a wanton, a thing of ugliness, a soiled and tawdry wench. The next, he called her a virgin most pure, most chaste, most admirable, and endowed her with every beauty and charm ever conceded by a lover's tongue, appraising separately and in sequence her features, her contours, her color, the texture of her skin, the fineness of her hair. With bold, splendid splashes of color and

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enunciation, he lifted her up, up from the degradation and the mire to which he so lately had debased her, and put her upon the apex of the world, erecting her upon a pedestal above all other women, his words a coronation, a canonization, and an apotheosis. When he had done, she raised a little brown hand to her mouth, and yawned prodigiously. Then she turned away.

Pascual Montara came forward, loudly rattling the fallen leaves with his feet to apprise Alvarado of his nearness.

"Let us be on our way," he said. "I have questioned this Pepe Flammenca and others of the Gypsy bucks, questioned them as though I were Fray Tomas de Torquemada himself! They know less of the men we seek than do sucking infants of sin. Come, Miguel Alvarado! It grows dark, and you will forget your duty to the Guardia Civil if you linger long here!"

Young Alvarado flashed an angry look at him. Then, suddenly getting in hand, he shrugged himself calm and said:

"Morales and the rest have not been here, eh? Well, let us clear our heels of the filth of this vile-smelling place before dark, then."

Without another word, he turned his back upon the girl and went seeking his pony among the trees. A sibilant, softly called Gypsy word, repeated twice, and the horse came clattering through the underwood toward him like a well-trained dog.

He mounted. Pascual Montara had gone striding across the clearing to retrieve his own animal. The girl lingered under the trees, standing as he had

found her, her back against the trunk of an algarroba, the toes of one nut-brown leg scratching the calf of the other, her eyes pensive.

"My Paquita," said Miguel Alvarado, sidling near her on his horse, "there is an ancient and massive wild olive far down at the gateway to this barranca. And it looks like a tall and handsome cavalier waiting for the moon to rise that he may have a meeting with some Gypsy girl who is his beloved."

She looked slowly up at him, then away.

"My Paquita," he persisted, "you have seen this wild olive, have you not?"

She did not answer him.

"My Paquita," he said again, "you are a Gitana. Tell me; you are wise in reading nature; will there be a moon clear of clouds to-morrow night?"

She slipped away from the trunk of the algarroba and started off toward the clearing. Suddenly, she paused and looked back over one shoulder. She answered his questions in the order asked.

"The wild olive is well-known to me, and there will be a fine moon to-morrow night. But there will be no meetings at the wild olive between you and me. I have no appetite for your caresses and kisses; I would hate you, did I not think too little of you. You are only a cinder in my eye! I have kept myself a virgin all these years for some man more bold and brutal and magnificent than you!"

Pascual Montara had mounted his horse and was waiting in growing impatience.

"Hola, mi companero!" he called. "What is keeping you?"

Trotting his horse out into the open space where were the three fires of black smoke and dancing embers, Alvarado joined him. Together the two policemen rode away up the shadow-haunted alleys of the steep and narrow barranca.

With a great gusto, the Gypsy bucks assaulted their evening meal. They had no need of plates nor forks. Three wolfish circles of men swiftly formed about the three steaming pots, which had been taken off the fires and left standing upon the grass. The pots contained the ubiquitous national dish of Spain, the puchero, that most savory of stews. Into the pots the Gypsies dipped with their navajas—those long, wicked-looking clasp-knives—and with their fingers.

It was like a grab-bag. In that puchero one could not know what variety of meat or vegetable one might pluck forth. The Gitanos went at the business of eating with a singular moroseness; they were like glum and voracious animals. When any secured a chunk of meat too large to be swallowed in one desperate mouthful, it was torn into more reasonable pieces by hands and teeth, or sawed into lengths by the ever ready navajas.

The women and children waited wistfully apart. It was not for them to sit and eat until the last of the males had done. They were the weaker, and they must take thankfully that which was left them by the strong.

One by one, the bucks got up from about the pots of puchero, licking their lips and reaching for papers and tobacco. The three fires had decayed and become mere hillocks of embers. The men

formed new and more indolent circles about these, smoking lazily, their eyes dull and complacent with eating. Chattering like famished sparrows, their voices sharp with eagerness, the women and children fell hastily upon the remnants their men had left.

It was about this time that a party of cabalgadores, riding hard, passed the massive wild olive that stood at the dingle's gateway like a *sereno,* like a metropolitan night policeman at the corner of a dark and narrow street. Keeping steadily on, they rode through the obscurity of the corridorlike reaches of the barranca, and swiftly drew near the opening among the trees and the camp of the Gypsies.

Soon they glimpsed the red of firelight through the underwood, and caught snatches of the shrill chattering of the women and children. There was an undertone of music from the camp, the soft reed-like notes of an accordion, and suddenly a man's voice began chanting "The Song of Juanito Ralli":

"The false Juanito, day and night,
Had best with caution go,
The Gypsy Cales of Yeira height
Have sworn to lay him low.

"Throughout the night, the dusky night,
I prowl in silence round,
And with my eyes look left and right,
For him, the Spanish hound,
That with my knife I him may smite,
And to the vitals wound.

"I'll wash not in the limpid flood
The shirt which binds my frame;

But in Juanito Ralli's blood
I'll bravely wash the same."

The strangers halted in the concealing underwood, drawing close together. Words passed in whispers; then the group of five separated. Three of the party moved slowly and quietly away through the trees; the other two waited, motionless as rock.

At length, the feat in strategy was successfully accomplished. In each of four sectors of the palisading circle of foliage and shadows which surrounded the opening among the trees, there waited a man, silent and watchful, a carbine ready in his two hands. No one of the four dismounted, but suddenly one rode briskly out into the clearing.

"Who is this?" cried Pepe Flammenca, starting up. "Not another policeman!"

"No, lo quiera Dios!" quietly returned the horseman. "God forbid, no!"

He halted his horse halfway to the groups about the fires. The Gypsy fellow with the open shirt and yellow sash had abruptly quit singing and playing the accordion. The very children were frightened into large-eyed silence.

"Ah, you are one of the *Errate,* one of the Blood!" exclaimed Flammenca. "It is a Zincalo that speaks, a Romano, a Cale. Is it not, *hombre?*"

"God forbid that too!" the horseman laughed shortly. "Approach, Pepe Flammenca, and see for yourself whom I am."

There was in his voice a certain imperious note. The gigantic Gypsy count moved slowly forward.

He peered at the brown youthful face beneath the broad-brimmed felt.

"Jacinto Quesada!" he whispered sharply, falling back a step. He looked over his shoulder at his Roms scattered upon the grass. They had heard his sharply sibilated whisper; and an echo of that whisper had passed over them as each repeated the name and sat up, dramatically moved.

CHAPTER XII

"WHAT do you do here, Quesada?" asked Pepe Flammenca.

Quesada ignored the question.

"Tell me," he said, "how long have you been encamped in this spot?"

"Four of our wagons have been here a fortnight. But three that had been delayed on the way joined us in this spot only this afternoon. I and my daughter, Paquita, came with the vanguard."

"There is a singular troop of cabalgadores somewhere upon the plains," remarked Quesada, studiously regarding him. "They are nine—all strangers to the countryside. They are led by a man known from end to end of Spain, the redoubtable espada, Manuel Morales. Two among them are outlanders; the one a Frenchman, the other an American.

"I seek news of them, Count. Perchance you may have encountered them in traversing the high parameras of La Mancha? Perchance you may have entertained them with a puchero in your encampment here?"

"Neither have I bespoke them nor have I had sight of them," returned Pepe Flammenca with great certitude.

"No? But of course not! It is only four days ago that they first enterprised abroad. However, the wagons of your caravan that just

came up to-day will surely have some word of them. These cabalgadores of Manuel Morales are an uncommon looking lot; some of them are outfitted in the full ring regalia of bullfighters; and the bright reds, greens and yellows of their costumes have caused the vaqueros and herders, who chanced across their path, to become puzzled and amazed and extravagantly talkative. Then, too, they bristle with Mausers and Mannlichers, and are heavily weighted with bandoleers in which cartridges are as thick as teeth in a man's mouth.

"Small wonder, Pepe Flammenca, that tongues have wagged and legends been fabricated—Morales and his men are nine of the most outlandish cabalgadores ever seen in these parts; they are nine Quixotes, as fantastic looking and out of place upon La Mancha as was the Ingenious Gentleman himself! Myself, I had word of them borne me across the wastes by a dozen different arrieros, and by the hard-riding horseboys of certain innkeepers of my acquaintance.

"It is strange, but I, and I alone, know on what business they ride. But then, I am the man they seek—I, Jacinto Quesada! But, Count, you are not making any inquiries among the men of the three wagons that joined you to-day. Do so at once!"

"There is no need, Don Jacinto. Already I have asked questions of them."

"But, man, you have not budged a foot! Carajo! do you think to trifle with Jacinto Quesada?"

"God forbid, no!" returned the gigantic Gypsy hastily. "But I speak the truth, Senor Quesada—already have I made inquiries among my men for

news of this Morales and his cabalgadores. Don Jacinto, it may surprise you, but others have been here no more than an hour ago seeking news of this selfsame Morales and his fantastic troop. They were two men of the Guardia Civil and—"

"Hola! Two Guardias Civiles? And no more than an hour ago? When they left you, which way did they ride?"

"Right on up the barranca—towards the mountains—and they did not stop for food."

Jacinto Quesada, keeping the Gypsy chieftain transfixed with his eye, raised his voice so that it carried all through the clearing and even out to the shadows beyond:

"Carajo! they were here, eh? Two Guardias Civiles—and they went right on up the barranca!"

At once and silently, two of the cabalgadores waiting in the shadows moved off up the dark defile. It was as though they were play-actors hidden in the wings of a stage, and the loudly shouted words of Jacinto Quesada were to them an awaited signal, a cue to be immediately obeyed.

"What do you desire of us, Don Jacinto?" asked Flammenca of Quesada, without seeming to notice his change of voice.

"Food."

"Sit down and eat. You are most welcome."

"Do you think Jacinto Quesada will be satisfied with your leavings and the leavings of your brats and wenches? Besides, there is not enough stew left to satisfy my stomach. I have the appetite of three men."

He looked at Flammenca a long moment, then

added, "And again, I have a following of four cabalgadores who will be here shortly. Their stomachs must be well garnished. They have ridden hard and steadily these last four days."

"Any you bring with you are most welcome here, Senor Quesada, my friend. Are not the Gypsies forever the friends of outlaws?"

"One of those who will come will be a lady, a gentle highborn lady—"

"Tell her to come forward out of the shadows, man! Why keep her waiting outside the clearing because of your foolish distrust of us? We Gypsies mean no treachery by you or yours, *ley tiro solloholomus opre lesti*—you may take your oath on that!"

The two men looked at each other for a long minute. Then Jacinto Quesada, in perfectly good grace, turned his head and called, "Forward, my Felicidad!"

She came forth, the golden-haired girl, riding a tobacco colored mare of the small but hardy Manchegan breed. She looked very proud and highborn and lonely, as she walked her horse slowly toward them.

"You are safe from all harm here, *madama,*" said Flammenca, bowing low. "Rest yourself and soon you will eat. My own daughter, Paquita, will serve you. We are your good friends even as we are the good friends of Jacinto Quesada."

Very courteously, he helped her dismount.

Just then sounded, very suddenly, the hoot of the eagle owl. It came from up the barranca. As it vibrated sharply between the steep high walls of the canyon, Flammenca turned and looked at the young

bandolero, cocking his ears the while. Quesada, in the act of dismounting, paused also and listened. The sound came again, a singular bird note, not much the ordinary hoot of an owl, but more a growl and something of a gruff scream.

Pepe Flammenca strode quickly to Quesada's side.

"The men you sent up the canyon after the Guardias Civiles have returned, I see," he said. "Call them in! You are overwary of me and my people, Don Jacinto. Such caution is commendable in most circumstances, but not when you deal with the Zincali. Trust us, Quesada; we will not betray you! Have we not for hundreds of years been outlaws hunted like wolves? Do you think the men of the Guardia Civil look upon us as their allies? We of the Zincali are thieves, and we honor you for being a greater thief than we. No reward the police of Spain can offer would make us prove false to you and yours!"

A long silence followed. Again Jacinto Quesada looked steadily into Flammenca's eyes and strove to read the soul of the man.

"Very well!" he said at length. He raised his carbine aloft and fired it into the air.

Briskly his three dorados, Rafael Perez, Ignacio Garcia, and Pio Estrada, rode into the clearing. It was noticeable then, in the light from the replenished fires, that no one of them was laden with the plunder from the hold-up of the Seville-to-Madrid. The chances were that they had left the telltale sacks of mail and conglomerate loot in the posada of some protecting cacique, or buried them between the con-

crete feet of some windmill, or cached them between the boulders in some gully in the foothills.

The three dismounted. With gratification they shook out their saddle-cramped limbs. Jacinto Quesada led his own horse and that of Felicidad over to one of the wagons and picketed them to a wheel. As he did, a nut-brown chit of a girl came and stood before him.

"You are that arrogant and absolute one, Jacinto Quesada!" she asked with rising inflection.

Jacinto Quesada nodded without speaking. The Gypsy girl looked at him in a way that gave him a singular feeling. Boldly she measured him with her eyes, appraised him. Her glance was at once inquisitive, prying, annoying, and yet ardent and approving. She had, too, the strange slow stare peculiar to persons of the Gypsy race, that fixed uncouth look that makes one feel much as if one were being hypnotized by a serpent.

"You are very young to be a bandolero," she remarked, half to herself.

Once again Quesada nodded without speaking.

"You are altogether unlike the bandoleros I have seen."

"It is the deed, senorita," said Quesada. "The deed makes us bandoleros—not the length of our limbs nor the cast of our faces."

"But you are very handsome!" she said. "You are as handsome as the very Hyperion himself!"

Surprised at the ardor with which she said these words, Quesada looked at her with a more curious interest. Small but oddly statuesque, a superbly

shaped figurine in her close-clinging calico dress of glowing vermilions and blazing saffrons, she stood with head ecstatically upraised toward him, her dusky eyes radiant with admiration. She thrilled a little toward him, her olive bosom undulating deeply and slowly.

"Who are you, child?" he asked.

"Paquita. I am the daughter of Pepe Flammenca."

Without comment, he made to return to the group about the fires. But she stayed him with a hand upon his arm.

"Tell me," she asked, panting with eagerness; "have you murdered many men on the mountains and on the plains?"

"Carajo, no! No man have I killed as yet, though I have battled with many," returned Quesada, wounded in his manhood. "I am but a simple Moor, not a ferocious beast that lusts to slay."

"But you are magnificent with pride and courage!"

"I love the fierce ecstasy of the running fight, the hand-to-hand skirmish! But there is little cold murder, know you, in my bowels. Now, leave me, *ninita!*"

Impatiently, he thrust her hand from his arm and started away. But she put herself before him, and once again uplifted her face and bathed him in the gaze of her ardent eyes. And she cried, her voice tremulous with a kind of passion:

"Don Jacinto, I have never before met any one like you! You are bold and imperious, you are savage and mighty, but you are not weakly cruel! And

ah, you are handsome—handsome as the very Hyperion himself!"

She suddenly burst into tears and fled away. Quesada looked after her, perturbed, amazed, and sorely puzzled. Her conduct was altogether inexplicable. But the underwood hid her from further sight. He shrugged his shoulders as one who should say, "She is only a Gypsy, poor thing!" and returned to the fires. His meal awaited him.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER they had garnished their stomachs with the puchero, they sat brooding around the three fires, the girl, Felicidad, and Jacinto and his three ruffians. The Gypsy lad with the shirt open to the waist and the yellow sash brought out his battered accordion again and played upon it for their entertainment.

He made it scream and exult obscenely; he made it lament like a fallen angel. He made it sing wild and wanton songs of Gypsy love; he made it chant of Gypsy treachery and Gypsy chiromancy. When you heard its uncouth and haunting assonances, you believed in the Evil Eye, the *Querelar nasula;* in the *Hokkano Baro,* the Great Trick; and even in the *Chiving Drao,* that sorcery by which the Gitanos cause horses to become sick and glandered, and swine to die as suddenly as if poisoned. In short, you believed all you ever had heard of the strange doings of the Zincali!

The hours fled by. Those about the fires grew sleepy. One by one, the Gypsy wenches withdrew into their tents. Then the girl Paquita spoke to Felicidad and led her away. They lay down to sleep that night—the highborn young lady and the girl of common Gypsy clay—in a certain wagon of the Gitanos. To that wagon came Jacinto Quesada and his three dorados, a short time later, and upon the open sward before it, threw themselves, their

ponchos wrapped around them to protect them from the night cold and dew.

After breakfast next morning, Quesada talked long and earnestly with Pepe Flammenca.

"You had best remain in camp, at least this morning," advised the Gypsy count. "Up above, there is going to be a great *monteria,* and there will be many men upon the mountains. Some one may see the Senor Don Jacinto and report it to the police."

"It is good, friend Pepe. And the other matter?"

Flammenca called aloud in the Gypsy *gerigonza.* Instantly followed a scene of extraordinary liveliness and interest. Flammenca, Quesada, Perez, Ignacio Garcia, and Estrada sat cross-legged on the grass. Flammenca's Gypsy lads led before them, first the horses of Quesada and his dorados, and then the three- and four-year-olds attached to the Gypsy caravan. There was a great chaffering; the various points of the horses were appraised enthusiastically and with minute care. It was an impromptu horse fair. Wherever found, whether in Spain, England, Russia, Hungary, or the United States, the true Gypsy is an expert *chalan* or horse trader.

When all the bargaining was over, Quesada and his dorados discovered they had not got off second best. They had acquired five new horses, unfatigued and glossy coated after a fortnight in the barranca. Their own jaded animals had come into the possession of Flammenca and his bucks.

"It would please the young lady who rides with us," said Quesada to the Gypsy chieftain, "if she

could change her attire for something more suited to the saddle."

"My Paquita will attend to the matter," returned Flammenca. "Let them go together into one of the tents and find out whether their clothing be fit to barter and whether their two pretty shapes are mates."

The girl, Paquita, had been hovering about Jacinto Quesada all the morning. At breakfast, she had anticipated his every desire, waiting on him with silent devotion. Continually she kept her great dusky eyes upon him, following him everywhere he went with a gaze abject and doglike in its utterness of adoration.

Now, Quesada drew forth a packet of tissue papers and a pouch of tobacco, of a sudden and altogether unexpectedly, she stooped above him and seized the papers and tobacco from his hands. Looking fixedly into his astonished eyes, she rolled a cigarette, wetting the edges with her lips. Then she handed the *papelito* to him, made a long obeisance, and turned away.

Her father chuckled and gave her the word to take Felicidad apart and find her fit riding clothes. She withdrew, looking over her shoulder at Quesada with passionate Gypsy eyes.

Sometime later, she and Felicidad came out of the tent into which they had vanished, and Felicidad wore a brown jacket and a brown bisected riding skirt, both rather the worse for wear, and Paquita was completely attired in Felicidad's green traveling dress. The Gypsy girl looked very charming in the more conventional attire, what of her nut-brown

skin and dye-black hair against the contrasting green.

She walked about the clearing with the grace of a she-leopard, continually smoothing the tight, revealing skirt over her hips, and rearranging and patting her hair which she had put up in imitation of Felicidad. Preening herself thus, she smiled often in a frank and childlike pleasure in herself. But there were no men about to admire her.

Quesada's dorados had gone behind the wagons to currycomb and further polish their new horses. The Roms, every last dishevel-headed and swarthy-faced lad, had left the camp immediately after the conclusion of the horse trading. Led by Pepe Flammenca, they had stalked silently up the barranca, their Mausers and Mannlichers couched tenderly in their arms.

They were bound for the heights above the barranca. There, in the tag-end mountains of the Sierra Morena, a great monteria, or mountain drive, was under way that day. Senor D. Pablo Lario de Quinones was the host. He was a rich Catalan who had made his millions in the cork industry. He had purchased two or three of the mountains for a sporting estate, and in one of the higher passes he had erected a shooting box. It was the only habitation within miles, for he had ousted the few native mountaineers from their landholds.

Among his guests for this particular monteria were many Spanish notables, high and mighty ones of Letters, the State, and the Church, as well as several foreign ambassadors and their attachés. The Duke of Fernan Nuñez, the Duke of Medin-

aceli, the Marquis of Viana, the Conde de Agrela, the Marquesa de Manzanedo, Colonel Barrera and Senor D. I. L. de Ybarra were among the crack guns invited.

Lario de Quinones had his own pack of *podencos,* or hunting dogs—a *recoba* of about forty dogs. But, as is the custom of the sporting gentry of Spain, certain of his guests—the Duke of Fernan Nuñez, the Conde de Agrela, and Colonel Barrera —had brought with them their own packs of podencos and their own huntsmen, to reinforce De Quinones' pack and make the drive a more stupendous affair.

Now, Pepe Flammenca and his Gypsy lads were arrant trespassers on the hunting grounds of the grandees. Should the mountaineers who served as beaters and extra huntsmen come upon them in the brushwood, they would thrash them unmercifully and drive them out of the mountains at the points of their guns. But Pepe Flammenca and his bucks were hardened and desperate poachers. It was their plan to skulk along the line of the drive and to hide themselves in thickets near the *armada* or firing line of gentlemen sportsmen; and should a wounded stag come bounding toward their places of concealment, it would be most swiftly killed and most swiftly borne away to their camp.

A head or two of game would not be missed, nor a rifle report away to one side cause much sensation in all that great to-do of the monteria. To drown the sound of the poachers' guns, there would be the baying and tinkling of bell-carrying dogs, the trumpeting of huntsmen upon their *caracolas,* the

shooting of blank cartridges to announce that some game-beast had been jumped, the crashing of beaters through the thorny cistus, and the running reports of magazine rifles along the *rayas* or open rides.

After the poaching Gypsies had gone on their quest, Quesada sauntered down to the brook. Here, where an arcade of oleanders shaded a tiny white beach, he seated himself upon a huge stone above a pool. He busied with watching the trout in the riffles and with spying upon two water shrews that swam beneath the surface of the slack water, and dipped and dived, seeking everywhere for food. For something like half an hour, these velvety-black little creatures engrossed Quesada's attention. Then, as pebbles tinkled down near at hand, he looked up to see the girl Paquita coming down the bank.

She seated herself beside him on one end of the stone, swinging her bare brown feet above the pool.

"You have not said that I look very pretty in this green Spanish dress," she said at length. "But that is your thought, is it not? It would not be difficult for me to be the proud and aristocratic lady, eh, man? But I would rebel if I must wear shoes! I think my sun-burnt little feet are prettier naked as they are!"

Quesada smiled and continued to smoke his cigarette.

She leaned her body against the bole of the tree behind, and clasped her hands behind her head, and thoughtfully regarded him. After a time, she said:

"Tell me, caballero of my soul—tell me, have you ever loved a Gypsy girl, a brown, soft-cooing maiden of the Zincali who was sugar and wine to kiss, and velvet and Filipino silk to caress?"

No, Jacinto Quesada had not.

"It is not too late, intrepid one, to make amends! Any Gypsy wench would be most glad to have you for a lover. Even a Gypsy count's daughter, even the loveliest Gypsy maid in all the Spains, would not be too proud to cling to your kisses, Busno though you be! Don Jacinto, I—I—Paquita—could love you, and no trouble at all!"

Persistently, he watched the water shrews in the runlet.

"Am I not prettier than she?"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"This highborn lady, this slow-blooded and cold aristocrat—she who is as pale as a sickly lily, as slender and ungraceful as a growing boy—this Felicidad!"

"I would not say she is too slender, Paquita; I would not say she is too pale! It is only that her sort of beauty does not please you, because it is not the Gypsy kind with which you are familiar."

"It is not that, Don Jacinto! I have seen her unclothed, I have seen her costumed only in her alabaster skin. There she stood in as much loveliness as the Senor Don Dios had thought fit to give her. And I looked her up and down with a woman's eye. *Chachipe!* the wench had nothing of fascination and beauty about her that I have not! She is young, yes, and soft, yes, and smooth of skin, and somewhat gracefully shaped. But she is at least three

years older than I, and she is no more a woman, no better rounded. My breasts are as fully blossomed and alluring! My—"

"Paquita, you are indiscreet!"

"Indiscreet? I, a Gypsy girl, indiscreet? Don Jacinto, we Gitanas are never indiscreet! A kiss or two, an errant arm about the waist, or a hand upon the breasts—what of that? An uncovered bosom, a shapely leg bared to the knee—there is little evil in that. But if you venture too far, if you touch upon our honor, thinking that we and honor to each other are strangers—Tate! you will find a dirk has nosed its way between your ribs!"

She laughed mockingly, showing her fine white Gypsy teeth.

"Am I indiscreet in speaking as I did about this girl of the Busne? Did I not undress and dress her with my own hands?"

"But you need not tell these things to me. I think her beautiful to death!"

"Oh, you cannot love her!"

"Love her? I do not know."

"Ah, but if you once turned your eyes upon poor wistful me—chachipe! you would soon know whether you loved me! I would make you hunger for me like a famished wolf, I would make your blood race and burn! When I danced the jota, or the Romalis, or merely moved languorously about, you would suffer all the thirsty bitterness of hell, all the exalted sweets of heaven!"

Jacinto Quesada looked away.

"But I do not desire to love you, Paquita."

"Si, si; but ah, if you only would! Could you

not love me only a little—you who are so proud and courageous, you who are so strong and absolute?"

Jacinto Quesada turned his head and plunged his austere glance into her deep yearning eyes.

"Paquita," he said, not coldly, but without any weakness of pity, "it is because I am strong and absolute that I cannot love you. When your eye caresses me with its look, your tongue with its subtle flattery, my masculinity rebels at the thought of being wooed by a woman; I am revolted, sickened! Fling your soul with the same impetuosity and passion to some Gypsy lad, and he may love you; but I—no, never I!"

She groaned aloud, knowing full well that he spoke a primitive truth. But she could not help yearning toward him, her face bloodless with desire.

Said he, "If you would but flee away from me, or shudder when your glance meets mine, or even treat me with disdain and coldness, perhaps then—who knows? But I must be the predatory one, the seeker, the stalker! Else I cannot love."

He made as if to rise. But before he could get upon his feet, she leaped up and bent above him and kissed him full upon the lips. Then swiftly and blindly she fled.

Once she had gone, Quesada did not bestir himself. He sat gazing morosely into the limpid tarn below his rock.

From a great distance, from away up in the mountains, there dropped down vaguely to his ears the ringing note of a pack of hounds in full cry. Came also, every little while, the bark of rifles re-

mote and far. Quesada gave no heed to these sounds. All through the morning, the mountain airs had wafted through the barranca vagrant notes of this same refrain.

Very suddenly, however, Quesada heard, from much nearer at hand, the voices of men shouting and hallooing. He heard his own name called. The voices drew nearer. The shouting men were in the barranca itself; they were noisily proceeding through the rattling underwood. He heard them on the path above his nook by the pool, still calling his name. He did not lift his voice in reply, nor even turn his head. But suddenly, from the bushes within touch of his hand and right behind his head, a voice spoke out, sharply, peremptorily:

"Aupa, Don Jacinto! There is no time to be lost. Already they are entering the gateway to this barranca!"

Looking over his shoulder, Quesada saw, no more than a yard in the rear and peering through a hole in the bushes, an uncouth disheveled face like the face of a satyr or faun—the Gypsy-eyed, bronzed, and grizzle-bearded face of Pepe Flammenca.

"Of whom do you speak?" asked the bandolero.

Answered Pepe Flammenca; "Of Manuel Morales and his fantastic cabalgadores!"

CHAPTER XIV

"We chanced to look down from a great rock on the mountain above," explained Pepe Flammenca, as swiftly he and Quesada returned to the clearing, "and we saw them moving across the broad sallow face of the plain, like slow-crawling sticky flies. For quite a time we watched them, wondering if they would come this way. They approached across the high plains, making straight for the entrance to this barranca. They ascended the hills, and then I returned alone to warn you that they would be here shortly. My lads continued on without me. They will skulk along the fringe of the Senor Don Pablo's great monteria, and I am willing to swear they will not come back empty-handed."

"You counted the cabalgadores—there were nine?"

"Seguramente, yes. And the noses of their carbines flashed like leaping trout in the sun. And two wore scarlet, two yellow, and another green. The green one was Morales himself, yes?"

Quesada nodded shortly.

"They did not ride with impetuosity, you say; they rode painfully slow? We have still time then, friend Pepe, to make a clean get-away before they climb through the barranca. With but fifteen minutes' grace I will guarantee to show my heels to the fleetest caballeros in all the Spains!"

They entered the clearing. Before one of the tents of many colors sat Felicidad like a golden-headed queen. A little court of scantily clad, brown-limbed Gypsy toddlers were ringed about her, engaged in lisping the songs of the Zincali for her entertainment. The verses sounded very strange coming from those soft baby lips; for the words were all of love, ardent and free, of murder and revenge, and of theft and treachery.

His amber Moorish eyes liquid and softly glowing, Jacinto Quesada halted a few feet off, and watched her and listened. A tousle-headed urchin of nine, his only uniform an abbreviated and airy shirt, stepped forward and chanted, with gusto, "The Laws of Romany":

"O never with the Gentiles wend,
Nor deem their speeches true;
Or else, be certain in the end
Thy blood will lose its hue.

"There runs a swine down yonder hill,
As fast as e'er he can,
And as he runs he crieth still,
Come, steal me, Gypsy man.

"To blessed Jesus' holy feet
I'd rush to kill and slay
My plighted lass so fair and sweet,
Should she the wanton play.

"Thy sire and mother wrath and hate
Have vowed against me, love!
The first, first night that from the gate
We two together rove.

"The girl I love more dear than life,
Should other gallant woo,
I'd straight unsheath my dudgeon knife
And cut his weasand through;
Or he, the conqueror in the strife,
The same to me should do.

"O, I am not of gentle clan,
I'm sprung from Gypsy tree;
And I will be no gentleman,
But an Egyptian free."

Felicidad looked up and flushed to a carnation color under the ardor of his eyes. Then, looking away, she asked, "What is it, Jacinto?"

"Come, my Felicidad! The sun is already high in the sky; it will be thirsty-hot on the upper slopes of the mountains. Let us mount and ride."

Pepe Flammenca had gone through the underwood seeking Rafael Perez, Garcia, and Pio Estrada; he found them out behind the wagons, busily engaged in currycombing and burnishing their new horses. Now he returned with the three at his heels, himself and two of Quesada's dorados bearing a raffle of harness in their hands and saddles on their shoulders, and the third leading by their halters the five barebacked animals.

At once and swiftly, Quesada's ruffians commenced to cinch the saddles upon the horses. Despite haste, the work was done most efficiently.

Quesada called Pepe Flammenca aside. He had become possessed of a new idea. He and the Gypsy chieftain put their heads together. Then Quesada called Rafael Perez over to them with a beckon

of the hand. Perez, too, joined in the low-whispered zipizape of words. An impudent and fantastic intrigue was plotted out, then and there, by that assorted trinity. As they separated again, Jacinto Quesada asked with sudden doubt:

"Will it be very difficult to change the appearance of Perez?"

"Not for Pepe Flammenca! Am I not of the Zincali? We of the Zincali can make a young horse seem old and decrepit, and an old horse show as much fire and hauteur as an unbroken stallion! And chachipe! we can change a black horse to white, and a piebald one to the color of tobacco! It is very simple, Don Jacinto, for the Children of Egypt."

"If you can make me pleasing to look at," chuckled Rafael Perez, "you will do wonders!"

Then he and Pepe Flammenca went together into the tent of the Gypsy chieftain, a more imposing tent than the others. His horse thereupon was led back behind the wagons and its harness hung upon the limb of a tree.

"Let us not tarry now. Aupa, you!" commanded Jacinto Quesada.

At the command, Pio Estrada and Ignacio Garcia flung themselves upon their horses. Quesada stood beside the horse of Felicidad and made a cup of his hands. The golden-haired girl put her little foot in the cup and was lifted into the saddle.

Then Quesada walked over to the tent of Pepe Flammenca to say a final word to Rafael Perez. Unaided by a mirror, Rafael Perez was shaving himself with care and yet with extreme haste.

Pepe Flammenca sat cross-legged at his feet, mixing a dark stew of pigments in an age-blackened calabash.

"I go, Rafael Perez," said Jacinto Quesada, poking his head under the flap. "I abandon you to your vices, and to Manuel Morales and his cabalgadores. Be prudent and discreet and sagacious, for henceforth you must enterprise single-handed and under cover. And may God go with thee!"

"And with thee, Don Jacinto of my soul!"

Quesada came back and threw himself astride his horse. "Adelante!" he commanded. The three men and the girl Felicidad filed slowly, on horseback, out of the clearing.

As they proceeded up the shadow-haunted alleys of the barranca, their pace quickened. At a smart trot they were approaching the upper end when, all at once, they were confronted by a girl who lingered beside the way. It was Paquita—Paquita with a pink rhododendron in her blue-black hair.

"You here, Paquita?" Quesada blurted. He was in the lead, and the girl disclosed herself with such surprising suddenness that she seemed a spirit conjured up in a blink of the eye.

"I waited here to say farewell to you, senor caballero of my heart," she replied. He made to push by, but she put her hands on stirrup and leg, yearning close. And panting with eagerness, she cried:

"Take me with you, Don Jacinto! For love of you I will give up wandering and all my other Gypsy ways! We shall have a cabana hidden somewhere in the mountains and secure from the Guardia

Civil, and there you will repair to be made blissful by me! Take me with you, or I shall sicken and die, for I love you so ardently that I am consumed by fires within!"

"For shame, girl! I am a Busno—I am of another race!"

She got on tiptoe and clasped her bare arms about his waist and clung tenaciously, passionately.

"Leave me behind then, but first—kiss me! Taste of my lips, they are as sweet as the sweetest! Wrap me in your arms so that I suffocate! Then kill me, if you will! Gladly would I die under your hands—death is better than to be disdained by you!"

Quesada, appalled by the strength and ferocity of her passion, drew away. He felt shame before Felicidad. His face aflame, he cried angrily, "I will have nothing to do with you!" And he started on again.

Very suddenly, then, her whole look changed. The ardent light fled from her eyes; forlornly her hands dropped to her sides; her slim girlish figure drooped and wilted. Most woebegone and piteous was she to see. And her voice a plaintive, fluttering sob, she called after him:

"Little caballero of the handsome face, there is a great tree at the entrance to this barranca—a wild olive that stands alone and waiting like a young bandolero who attends in patience until the coming of nightfall and his brown Gypsy love. There will be a fine moon to-morrow night."

"It is of no importa!" said Quesada, without

looking back. "There shall be no more meetings of you and me. Go thou with God!"

The girl quivered beneath the scorning words like a flame harshly blown upon. But suddenly she pulsed rigid; a heat sharp as pepper, bitter as bile, violent as the sun, coursed through her veins; her face grew ashy and drawn, her dusky eyes glittered like a cat's. Like a cat she was then, like a beautiful she-leopard wounded into a barbarous and terrible ferocity.

"Go thou!" she screamed—"Go thou with Satanas, the foul-smelling, the gangrened! You are not a man; you are a putrescent sore, an ulcer, a leprosy! I hate you, I loathe you, and I will have your life taken from you some day!"

She ran after him, shrilly screaming her rage. She was a virago, a witch-woman! She picked up a stone and flung it after him. It struck the horse of Felicidad upon the withers. She picked up more stones and flung these. And a thousand vile curses she flung also. Coming thus from a woman's lips, they were worse than an abomination of sound; they were a pollution, a hideous obscenity.

Even Quesada's ruffians were appalled. For himself, Quesada was most glad that the horse of Felicidad was the one struck by the first stone. In a panic, it galloped away. She was soon out of earshot.

They hurried after her.

CHAPTER XV

Not at once did the girl Paquita return to the camp of the Gitanos. Her low broad brow clouded with sullen anger, her dusky eyes somber and morosely smoldering, she clambered swiftly down the rocks of the watercourse. In the precipitancy of her descent, in the headlong hurry and indecorum with which she moved through swale and sunlight and between boulders and clumps of rhododendron, there was yet something of cold decision and steadfastness to purpose. She came out, at last, on the tiny beach of white sand beside the pool.

A red cloth on a rock caught her eye. She snatched it up and clenched it to her heart. It was the head-kerchief of Jacinto Quesada. When but lately he had sat and gloomed on that boulder above the pool, he had dropped it from his pocket and gone off unawares.

She replaced the red headcloth upon the boulder. It lay there in a crumpled crimson heap, and it pulsed a little as its folds eased out. It looked like a dying heart.

From some recess in her bosom, the girl Paquita drew forth a small moleskin sack on a string and shook its contents out upon the top of the rock. There was a looking-glass, smaller than the palm of her small brown hand. There was a flint and a bit of steel. There was a chunk of lodestone, the magnetic iron-ore which the Gypsies of Spain call

La Bar Lachi and which they claim is possessed of a thousand magical and miraculous properties. There were, also, a half dozen other uncouth Rommany charms and talismans.

She propped the hand-glass upright against the crumpled head-kerchief. She fell to her knees before it. With an unwavering and strangely intense gaze, with a stark contemplation, she stared into the eyes reflected from the mirror.

Five minutes, then ten snailed painfully by. The process of self-hypnosis went on. She was like one transfixed by a hooded cobra. Her body grew gradually rigid, and her breathing ever deeper and slower. At last she seemed not to breathe at all. Her eyes vacant and numbly fixed, she rose slowly to her feet.

She crossed the tiny beach of clean white sand. She stooped with a fluent graceful flexure at the brim of the pool, filled her hands with wet sand, and slowly pressed and molded that wet sand into an uncouth little image of a man.

The diminutive effigy she deposited upon the beach, setting it upright on its vaguely defined and overbroad feet. A second time, she stooped at the water's edge, filled her hands with sand, and again packed and shaped that wet sand into a squat little figure. Only this time the effigy bore a crude but easily perceived resemblance to a woman.

She deposited the one image on the beach beside the other. She gathered dry leaves and scraps of tinder-rot and made two little piles of them, each before a tiny figurine. She returned to the boulder, swathed the lodestone in the red headcloth and,

lodestone and cloth in hand, bore them back across the beach. And everything was done with extreme slowness, with acute and painful deliberation. She was like a somnambulist in a walking sleep.

She fetched the flint and the steel from the boulder. She could execute, it seemed, only one errand at a time. She dropped to her knees above one of the tiny piles of dry leaves and tinder-rot, and busied herself with the flint and steel. So soon as the one leafy hillock commenced to burn bravely, she translated its flame. The other little bonfire cackled with a like eagerness and gusto.

Stepping back from her uncouth little idols and tiny sacrificial fires, she undid a catch here and another catch there, and her shoulders and then her hips emerged from the green gown, and the gown fell in a swishing billow about her brown bare feet. Clad only in her olive-pale, satin-smooth and satin-glowing skin, she stepped out of the atoll of green cloth and commenced a slow and strange dance there upon the sands.

It was not a dance voluptuous or obscene. It was a solemn dance of statuesque attitudes, and flowing flexures, and ceremonious pauses. Very like was it to some ritualistic dance of the sacerdotal dancing boys of the Cathedral of Toledo. And yet there was in it a taint of sorcery and demonolatry.

She stooped at the water's edge to dip therein her hands. Dancing on, she shook a few drops of water from her finger tips down upon the flames. Smoke arose, a gust of smoke for each trinity of drops. The while her eyes remained fixed and

vacant and she danced slowly, she chanted a sort of weird incantation in the gerigonza of the Zincali.

Her voice was very low and came as with great effort. This was the rigmarole she chanted, translated from the Romany, which is descended from the Sanskrit and which it much resembles:

"To the Mountain of Olives one morning I hied,
Three little black goats before me I spied,
Those *three* little goats on *three* cars I laid,
Black cheeses *three* from their milk I made;
The *one* I bestow on the lodestone of power,
That save me it may from all ills that lower;
The *second* to Mary Padilla [1] I give,
And to all the witch hags about her that live;
The *third* I reserve for Asmodeus [2] lame,
That fetch me he may whatever I name."

The rhythm of that solemn dance grew ever more sprightly. Her languor dropped from her like a discarded shift. Faster and faster her brown bare feet beat the sands. She leaped ecstatically in air. Suddenly the dance ended in a whirl of exaltation. Then, for a long minute, she stood like one petrified, like a statue sculptured in onyx, her brown arms upflung, her face uplifted and sublimated. And in the voice of a demoniac, she screamed:

"Oh, *el buen Baron!* O Asmodeus the Lame! Send an evil upon the arrogant head of the stripling Quesada, he who tore the heart from my virgin

[1] Mary de Padilla, a notorious witch of Medieval Spain and mistress of Peter the Cruel of Castile (1333–1369).

[2] Asmodeus, an evil demon. Appears in later Jewish traditions as "king of demons." Also Beelzebub and Apollyon. Familiarly called the genius of matrimonial unhappiness, or jealousy.

breast and then ground it beneath his heel as though it were a ball of dung! Accursed was the salt placed in his mouth in the church when he was baptized, the vile Busno! He is too disdainful of me, too contemptuous! Send a black evil upon him and his, O Asmodeus! O Apollyon! By the three black little goats and the three black little cheeses, I invoke you!

"Humble him, break his heart of arrogant cold granite by making those he loves most fondly fall into fevers and die like flies in a frost! Send an evil of hideous disease upon those about him! Make those about him fall ill of horrid discharges and cramps of the stomach; then weaken them by causing them to vomit a gray pasty whey; then turn their bodies to blue and purple, and then let them die within twelve or twenty-four hours!

"Break his spirit as my father breaks the spirit of a proud black stallion, O Asmodeus the Lame! Do this for thy handmaid and votaress, do this for Caste Sonacai, known to the Busne as Paquita, the child of Flammenco Chorolengro, hetman of the clan of Barolengro and count of the people of Zend!"

You must know that the Gypsies of Spain practice a magic of two kinds. Their magic of the first kind is compounded of pure bunkum and fraud. Always in public do they practice this charlatanry and upon gullible Gentiles whom they hope to hocus-pocus and swindle out of a few pesetas. When they tell a buena ventura, or fortune, by crossing the dupe's palm with a piece of the dupe's gold, this is the sort of arrant nonsense they practice. The

Hokkano Baro, the Great Trick, is another of their thieves' devices. The Ustilar Pastesas and the Chiving Drao are still others. In not one of the swindling tricks mentioned do they use any true clairvoyancy or authentic warlockry; it is all sleight-of-hand and humbuggery. At this kind of magic the Gypsies laugh loudest themselves.

Those who in public practice magic in order to hoodwink others, always practice in secret another sort of magic which they consider the true magic, and in which they devoutly believe. This is dogma. Did not the priests of ancient Egypt make magic in public to the cat-headed god Bast, the bull Ptah, and the lioness Sakhmi whom they despised as images of stone and machinery, but to whom they salaamed that the ignorant rabble might continue to be hoodwinked? And did not those same priests make magic in secret to the one true God? Thus with the Gypsies. In secret they practice another and second kind of sorcery which they believe in with a fanatic faith!

And that was the kind of magic the girl Paquita practiced in secret down on the tiny beach by the oleander-arcaded pool. Her execration solemnly concluded, the beautiful and youthful dealer in the warlockry of the Roms became again a hot wind of action. Swiftly she ran to the pool, filled her cupped hands with water, and as swiftly came back again.

The fires had died down into twin nests of coals. She cast no water upon them. What water she carried in her cupped hands, she threw upon that little sand image which resembled a man.

Without pausing to watch the havoc she played with her handiwork, she repeated the action, this time throwing water upon the little effigy which looked vaguely like a woman. Then, her midnight-black hair falling about her face and her dusky eyes burning from beneath the obscuring oily threads with a strange sibylline fire, she crouched on her brown bare heels before the two sodden hillocks of sand.

Now, when standing upright, the two little images of sand had seemed mated divinities, bound together by a common majesty. In their downfall and watery ruin, however, one might say that they had become antagonized; there was that in the way they fell which suggested a coldness between them, a rift, a void. In melting and crumbling, the two watersoaked little images had fallen gently away from each other.

Paquita got up and shook back the hair from her face. Her face was flushed, her eyes glowing with glad triumph. She laughed long and arrantly.

"It is written in the sands!" she exclaimed. "She will never have Jacinto Quesada for her bridegroom. It is written; it has been shown to me! Never will those two lie down together on the bed of marriage! And a plague—even that hideous plague I asked for—shall come upon them; a plague of low fevers and cramps of the stomach; a plague that shall color their bodies blue and purple!"

CHAPTER XVI

HYPNOSIS is an abnormal cerebral state that soon wears off. As one who wakes from a sleep or a spell, the girl Paquita now stretched her arms wide, blinked her eyes, and looked swiftly over her shoulders and this way and that.

Then slowly, her head bowed in thought, her brow knotted in a little puzzled frown, she walked to where lay rumpled on the sand her ocean-green Spanish gown. She slipped into it, returned, stamped into the beach the debris of the two images and then clambered up the rocks. She left the watercourse behind, and neared the camp of the Gitanos.

As she came through the trees that palisaded the clearing round, she heard her father's voice and answering voices that she never before had heard. She hesitated a moment, then crept forward quietly, almost to the edge of the line of trees. Her body hidden by a bush, she parted the screening foliage with her hands and looked out as through a little window.

Her father, Pepe Flammenca, known to the Gypsies as Flammenco Chorolengro, stood face to face with an oddly attired stranger and with him busily talked. The fantastic stranger was hardly thirty. He was a little below the middle height, had a long body and short muscular legs, and seemed all iron and strength.

He wore the black rosette and ribbons of a matador in his coleta, his queue—that long, thick, and sacred lock of hair all bullfighters wear as the time-honored insignia of their ancient profession. His brown Andalusian face was the typical young bullfighter's face—boyish, almost effeminate with its mild contours. Upon his hands he wore riding gloves. Over the shoulders of his short, gold-braided green jacket were slung bandoleers crowded with cartridges. On a belt about his waist hung a revolver and a sheathed knife. The pink silk stockings that clad his legs were almost concealed by a pair of riding-boots of Cordovan horsehide.

Addressing Pepe Flammenca, he said, "A hundred times, in the last four days, we have lost our way on the plains. And now we are about to assault the defiles and goat paths of the Sierra Morena. We must have a guide. You know the mountains; agree to guide us at your own price!"

Behind him, standing in various attitude of attention, was a whole background of men in oddly assorted costumes. When he spoke, they all nodded assent like a Greek chorus, and remarked, "Si, si!" Evidently, the young matador was their spokesman.

"I cannot," Pepe Flammenca answered; "I must stay here. I am the chief of this clan and must remain with my own people. But there is another Gitano somewhere about the camp. To replenish our stock of wild meat, the others went early away, but he and I stayed behind to look after the horses and foals. With my permission, he can guide you.

He knows the Sierra Morena thoroughly. I will call him."

Pepe Flammenca turned round, cupped his hands about his mouth and bellowed, "Aguilino!"

Came forth from behind the wagons, another man whom Paquita had never laid eyes on before.

He was clean-shaven, and brown as a mulatto. He wore the corduroy leggings of a Gypsy and a red-striped shirt, and in true Zincali fashion, his head was wrapped tightly with a red kerchief. Where his left eyebrow once had been, was a hideous yellow scar that curved down as far as the cheek bone. What with his harsh and evil features and his mulatto-mahogany skin, this yellow scar gave him an altogether villainous look. In his left hand, he held a currycomb.

As the man approached, Pepe Flammenca turned to another of the strangers and remarked:

"When you first accosted me, after dismounting, you asked me for news of the bandolero, Jacinto Quesada. Three times you asked me, and three times I gave you the same reply. I was most truthful, but you were not assured. You showed me a hand in which lay five gold coins. You thought I had clenched my tongue between my teeth for some good reason, and the sight of the red metal would make me loosen it. But even your tempting golden Alfonsos did not cause me to lie. I have not seen Jacinto Quesada in months, I repeat. I have had no word of him in months. Of his recent movements I know nothing.

"But question this buck of my clan, this Aguilino! You will be assured of my honesty, then. I desire

that. I know one of you to be Manuel Morales, the greatest matador in all the Spains, and I desire Manuel Morales to be convinced that Pepe Flammenca is no teller of lies."

"I am convinced already, my friend!" interposed Morales at that. "Your last words convince me."

But another of the strangers, a foreign-looking hombre, proved more cautious.

"We will do what you say and question this man," he agreed in stilted and strongly accented Spanish. "But first let us find out whether this Little Eagle of yours will guide us through the mountains. That's the most important business."

The man with the foreign accent was big, broad-shouldered, fair-haired and as smooth-shaven as any bullfighter. He was square of face, his jaw was a round resolute knob, and his eyes were blue and very steady in gaze. He was garbed in a dark sack suit of rather formal cut, a pair of tan riding boots and a peaked Manchegan sombrero; and heavily equipped with a belt of cartridges, a carbine and a Colt's automatic. It was the American, John Fremont Carson.

The nine fantastic looking cabalgadores closed about the ruffianly Aguilino. They listened eagerly while Carson spoke to him in low persuasive tones. At length Aguilino commenced nodding his head, saying, "Si! I agree. Si! I will go with you."

The tall Frenchman with the waxed mustache, Jacques Ferou, whispered triumphantly in Carson's ear, "We have our guide. Now let fall the name of Jacinto Quesada!"

But the man Aguilino did not recoil at the sharp and sudden mention of the bandolero.

"Seguramente, yes; I have heard of him often. On the plains and in the mountains. He is a most celebrated man. No, I have never seen him in the flesh. Nor have I word of his recent movements. You say that he must have passed this way either in the dark of last night or in the gray of this very morning? Ah, senores, you do not know how many barrancas there are that gutter these foothills! You do not know how like a shadow this man Jacinto Quesada is—how like a fox that skulks and dodges and keeps always his distance from the habitations and bivouacs of men such as we! Jacinto Quesada come to our camp and break bread with us? Ah, senores, senores, that would be too much honor!"

The nine men exchanged glances of disappointment and dismay. They had been altogether off in their guess. Jacinto Quesada had not stopped in passing to hobnob with the Gypsies. He had not passed that way at all. The cabalgadores felt themselves like beagles who mill around and bark in vain braggadocio. Jacinto Quesada had shaken them off his heels. Neither sight nor smell of their game had they.

At this disheartening stage, suddenly from the forest a nut-brown girl in a green dress came out and stood before them. She was round limbed and delicately graceful as any nymph or naiad of the glens and waterfalls. Her dye-black hair hung loose upon her shoulders; two spots of hot crimson burned on the roundness of her cheeks; and her eyes

pulsed like fiery opals. She seemed all aflame with some strong emotion. In a throaty shaking voice, she cried out:

"My father lies! This Aguilino whom I have never seen before—he too lies! Jacinto Quesada has been here, in this very spot! He came to this barranca in the dark of last night—he and three dorados and a tall ungraceful wench, pale as a sickly lily! They were given food, they were given shelter for the night. Then went away but two hours ago. They went on up the canyon!"

A sharp gust of wind shrilled through the barranca, rattling among the trees overhead. The sky seemed suddenly to darken, the day to grow colder. Pepe Flammenca snarled aloud, between bared fangs, in the gerigonza of the Gypsies which the strangers did not understand:

"You horrible flea, you maggot of the dung, you vile daughter of an unfaithful mother! Into my *tan* and say not another word! For every word you have said, you shall pay with ten lashes of greenhide across your bare back!"

The cabalgadores could not know what he said, but they sensed the threat shaking his voice. No one spoke or made a move. The girl looked at her father a moment with eyes like cold gloomy mountain lakes, then moved slowly toward the large tent of the hetman. Her lips were set in a disdainful and a triumphant smile.

About the clearing and above her head, the trees shook and swayed as in an agony. Three great drops of water fell with the weight of leaden bullets and made slow stains upon her green gown. The

dog-grass, vetch and darnels of the clearing lifted up and seemed to drink the air. A storm was approaching. Leaves whirled about like a hundred excited birds.

Of a sudden, the girl Paquita paused near the tent to turn her head and fling back the words:

"I have not lied! Though my father will beat me for it, I have told the truth! I hate Jacinto Quesada!"

"Say another word, thou child of a witch-woman and a demon!" sibilated Pepe Flammenca in the Gypsy gerigonza, "and I will kill thee with my bare hands!"

The girl Paquita entered the tent of her father, there to await him and his whip of greenhide.

Suddenly and with great gusto, it began to rain. Great drops of water, lead-gray and heavy as shot, pelted down. The cabalgadores sought the cover of the trees. But the trees afforded little shelter, as the rain volleyed this way and that at the will of the gusts of wind, and each drop seemed to hold a whole cupful of icy water. In a trice, the men were wet to the skin.

Pepe Flammenca motioned them to the tents. Manuel Morales, Jacques Ferou, and the American, Carson, found themselves together beneath the same protection of canvas and vari-colored rags.

"What do you think?" asked Morales.

"That she spoke the truth," returned the Frenchman. "She had on my Felicidad's green traveling dress. Jacinto Quesada has indeed been here."

"But will that great bearded Gypsy beat the girl?" anxiously asked Carson.

The tall Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"The Zincali are a strange people, *mon Americain!*" said he. "And, besides, she said he is her father. Would you interpose between a father and his daughter?"

Carson subsided into a gloomy silence and looked about the tent.

"But this guide, Aguilino," continued Ferou. "He lied to us, Morales. Should we trust ourselves to his guidance?"

"What would you?" returned Morales in Spanish fashion. "We must have a guide in these mountains, and there is no one else to hire. Surely, this Aguilino is better than no guide. We will watch him, we nine men, and above all, we will go on."

The American motioned them into silence. He nodded over his shoulder toward the rear of the tent. Behind them, they saw a naked child asleep on a blanket between two dogs and an old hag of a Gitana crouched in a corner, her eyes alive and fixed unwaveringly upon them.

The men remained wordless but they did not sit down. The smell of unwashed bodies and much-used body blankets of a sudden breathed into their nostrils. The tent was filthy. All at once, the three wished themselves out in the sweet, clean, if wet open again.

"What these folk need is education," whispered Carson in Morales' ear. "Education can do everything!"

"Education, si!" returned Morales in the same manner. "But what they need more is some one

with a lion heart, a great golden arrogant heart, to lead them in the fight, to lead them up!"

Jacques Ferou said nothing, but as he followed them out into the open, he smiled his calculating and very superior smile.

Outside, the very mountains above seemed to have melted away into opaque sheets of driving water. The earth was sliding in brown streams from under their feet. The barranca boomed like a thousand drums beaten by mad Arabs.

To make himself heard above the booming of the rain, Jacques Ferou cupped his hands about his mouth and screamed into the faces of the others: "Let us go back. Sacre, we are soaking water here!"

"No!" returned the others, and they grimaced in disgust. But the rain fell with such outrageous passion that it was unendurable; there was naught to do but return within the tent.

Driven to it, they sought the shelter of the tent once again, but found it now a very poor shelter beneath that onslaught of rain. It leaked like a Japanese paper umbrella. And all the time the trees ran with heavy tears, and the rain flooded down with a tumultuous booming and a morose persistency.

CHAPTER XVII

THAT night, after the storm ceased and a spell before the moon rose, a man of the Guardia Civil rode across hills sweetened by the rain, and came in a roundabout way to the ancient wild olive at the portal of the barranca of the Gitanos. Here he dismounted and waited like one keeping a tryst, smoking innumerable cigarettes and kicking up the soft loam impatiently. He was Miguel Alvarado.

At length and on the sudden, he heard sounds as of some one coming toward him down the canyon through the dripping leaves. He hearkened a moment, then lifted his voice in a rich but gentle baritone:

"Loud sang the Spanish cavalier,
And thus his ditty ran:
God send the Gypsy lassie here,
And not the Gypsy man."

She came to him from out the trees, the wench Paquita. She was clad in a dress of vermilions and yellows, those vermilions and yellows now bedusked by the soft light of the night. In her hair was wound a green scarf. And, as she approached, she sang the answering quatrain:

"At midnight, when the moon began
To show her silver flame,
There came to him no Gypsy man,
The Gypsy lassie came."

Impulsively he ran to meet her. They were like shadows that merged together and became one. They trembled, they swayed; they swayed as the wild olive swayed in the wind of the night. They kissed long and ardently. Then she drew herself away, throwing her head back and holding him off with arms rigidly extended.

"Ah, Miguel, my caballero of the impetuous lips," she sighed, "I could love you with all my heart and soul, but for one little thing!"

"Carajo! what is that?" he asked, his voice sharp with anxiety and eagerness. "Have I not always been the most adoring and tender of lovers—aye, and the most voracious and headlong, too? Did I not hurry pellmell for this meeting, the moment you sent word to me by that Gypsy brat? What have I done to make you think dismally of me? How have I displeased you? Tell me; I burn to know!"

She suddenly drew herself to him and clung there once again, kissing his lips and fondling his head with her hands. He shivered in every limb. He moaned in an ecstasy of delight, and pressed her to him with such impetuosity and gusto that it seemed as if his arms would break her body in two.

Beneath the ardor of his greedy embrace, the girl Paquita shuddered and went very pale in the gloom. A scream rose in her throat but she smothered it, unborn. Across her shoulders, under her gaudy gown, were red raw furrows where her father's greenhide had bitten and seared her. But she made no outcry, she gave no sign, though she was as one who has been tortured horribly and then

given up to the iron caresses of a terrible, crushing machine.

His arms relaxed somewhat after a little, and she lay upon his neck and whispered:

"It is not what you have done; you were always the perfect lover. It is what you are. You are a policeman, one of those feared and hated and despised by my clan. I feel shame in loving a man of the Guardia Civil; there is something in my Gypsy blood that makes me feel that shame. It is the uniform you wear, the things that it symbolizes."

"We Guardias Civiles are the bravest of Spaniards. We are most brave and mettlesome men, every one!" returned the young policeman slowly, seeking to marshal his arguments in order. "Most Spanish girls are quick to love us if only because of our smart uniforms and gallantry and daring. And it is as natural for me to be a policeman as it is for you to be a Gitana. My father is a sergeant of the police; he has been in the Guardia Civil for thirty years. And all my male ancestors have been Guardias Civiles back to the long-ago, when they were bandoleros and outlaws who grew tired of being hunted and became Miquelets."

"But if you were more like your ancestors, the Miquelets—ah, then I could love you body and soul!" breathed the girl Paquita. And she went on very softly:

"Last night, there came to our camp in the barranca an outlaw, a salteador de camino. He was strong, he was magnificently strong, and he had a long absolute jaw and bold, proud, imperious eyes. About him, like an odor, hung the reek of the

imposing and cruel and terrible things he had done.

"It is natural for us Gitanas to love an outlaw; we Gitanas are outlaws to the core, ourselves. And he was as arrogant as a Bourbon prince, or a sheik of Barbary, or an Andalusian sun on a noonday; but he looked at me only with the eyes of contempt, granite eyes. I made the fool of myself by flinging my body and soul at his feet. He—"

"Cascaras! what was his name?" cried Miguel Alvarado sharply. It was as though a knife had been plunged into his side and twisted this way and that.

"He was the glorious bandolero, Jacinto Quesada!"

"Jacinto Quesada! That swollen toad, that strutting mountebank in rags and tinsel, that upstart, the zascandil! Por los Clavos de Cristo! and you flung yourself at him?"

"But he is altogether the arrogant and brave man, altogether the savage and magnificent one!"

"Carjo! he is only a mountaineer's brat. We grew up on opposite slopes of the same mountain of the Sierra Nevada. His clodhopper of a father sold firewood to the sweet mother of me! He is uneducated; has no resource or originality. And he lacks entrails as well as brains! I am more varonil, I tell you; more impetuous with headlong daring than he. Were there a man such as Miguel Alvarado in the shoes of Jacinto Quesada, there would be things done, I wot! But I will show you what is what. I—"

"Yes, yes, you will show me—how, when?"

But to the ears of Miguel Alvarado the wind had borne sound of the to-do raised by an approaching horse. He hearkened to that pounding and clattering, looking down the sweep of foothills below the barranca. He saw nothing just at once. But the sounds became more distinct, drew nearer. Those sounds leaped toward them in great panther leaps.

Suddenly a man on horseback came bounding over the hogback of a hill right below. He wore the tight uniform and the businesslike look of a man of the Guardia Civil. His policeman's three-cornered hat of shiny leather shimmered in the light of the newly risen moon. With the velocity and abandon of a French dragoon, he galloped full tilt up toward the barranca. And as he came, he shouted:

"Hola, Miguelillo!"

"It is my officer, my parent!" whispered the young policeman, and he swore softly in disappointment. Then, with the absolute obedience of only a Spanish son, he shouted back: "Here I am, Don Esteban, my father! What do you want of me?"

The sergeant of police came up like a driving pillar of sand and dismounted while his horse was in full charge. Swinging his quirta, he advanced swiftly upon the pair. There was in him no sign of the weakness of age. He had a short, knife-sharp white beard, and a face as lean and haughty as a griffon vulture's. From his tricorn hat still hung down, behind his head, a sun shield of white linen cloth.

"Come away with me!" he ordered peremptorily.

"I have word that Jacinto Quesada is in the mountains near the Pass of Despenaperros. While there's work to do for Spanish policemen, I'll not have you playing the bear for the entertainment of any senorita in Spain, no matter how fine the moon!"

He peered into the soft shade beneath the wild olive.

"Aha, the maiden is with you, I see! But, zut! this is bad. She and you alone in this abandoned glen—has the girl no thought for what the people of her village will say of her?"

"The girl is a Gitana!" spoke up Paquita proudly.

"A Gitana! Blood of Christ! my son keeping tryst with a Gitana! Have you no respect for your Christian mother, you ungrateful whelp? Have you no pride in your policeman father and in your ancestors that have been keepers of the peace of Spain for a hundred years? Have you no thought of the uniform you wear?"

The father was severely angry.

"This is disgraceful, this is vile, Alvarado, my son! A Gitana, eh! Come away with me, at once. Come away, and no more words with this wanton Gypsy wench, or I shall lay my quirta across your back!"

The imperious old man turned on his heel, strode away, and leaped with one lithe strong spring upon his horse's back. Miguel Alvarado turned from the girl and moved reluctantly toward his own horse. He feared his father too much to disobey him. He feared his father as he feared neither God nor the Devil. He knew his father would

beat him without qualm or ruth at the first word or look of defiance or rebellion.

Man-grown though he was, he could prove to you an acquaintance with his father's rawhide quirta by merely baring his young body to the waist. Spanish family life is the most solid and wholesome thing about Spain. Spanish sons and daughters respect and revere those who gave them life; they have been taught respect and reverence at the ends of whips. In the same manner, Jehovah made the Israelites love him; and who, through all the years of the world, have been more faithful to God than the stern race of Jews?

"I will be here, at this wild olive, ere the waning of three nights. At midnight of the third night, meet me, Paquita, virgin of my soul!" whispered Miguel Alvarado, bending down from the saddle.

"You will tell me then what you will do?" she whispered in return. "You will tell me then, will you not, my caballero of the impetuous lips and the great courage? I will remain chaste as gold, pure as a sacrament, for you, caballerete!"

"I will prove to you that I am not unworthy of your great love, my little one. This Jacinto Quesada—za!"

He thundered away after his proud and haughty parent.

CHAPTER XVIII

Up from the misty profundities of the Llanos de Jaen climbed, like slow obstinate flies, the nine fantastic cabalgadores of Manuel Morales. Also, their guide, Aguilino. They were all afoot. With them, up the altitudes of the pass, yearned seven pack mules, heavy and swollen with great panniers of provisions.

The nine Quixotes and their scarred wolf of a guide had put two weeks of frugal living and heartbreaking toil between them and the barranca of Pepe Flammenca and his unwashed Gypsy clan. Right off, they had lost one horse and then another. The beasts had taken headers off mountainsides. They had consulted with their guide, the man Aguilino. He gave them to understand that horses were considered of very little worth in both the Sierra Morena and the Sierra Nevada. For a caravan of asses, they succeeded in bartering their horses with the arrieros, or muleteers, going down.

Now, after two weeks, they had at last won through the rolling torrent of mountains called the Sierra Morena. They were inching themselves up the long perpendicular miles of the windy gorge of the Llanos de Jaen.

The Llanos de Jaen is very narrow. One would think one could hurl a peseta across it, until one tried. Were it not for the chasmy gap of the Llanos de Jaen, the Sierra Morena and the Sierra

Nevada would be one tremendous chain of mountains.

Halfway up, a mule stumbled in turning the flank of a precipice and took the leap, screaming like a soul thrown headlong to Hell. The nine Quixotes clung to the rock wall and felt sick to their stomachs. The mule seemed falling for a thousand years. They did not dare to look down and see it strike. The mule was the one the guide Aguilino had been leading. Perhaps a shove from him had sent it on its way to death. Again, perhaps not.

High above, upon the top of a glassy and steep *risco* or overhanging rock, a man had moored himself with a short rope of horsehide. He was Jacinto Quesada. But he did not look the bandolero of the plains. Garbed as he was in alpagartas or rope sandals, the better to grip the precipitous ascents, and in sheepskin zamarra and long shawl as protection against the cold, he looked the true mountaineer.

With the vigilant application of an eagle eying its meat circling all unaware beneath its lofty eyrie, Quesada had been watching the men climb laboriously up the sheer of the pass. Now, as the mule fell to its magnificent death, he nodded his head in approbation and remarked to himself:

"Rafael Perez has finally set to work, I see! That is the first poor mule. But the whole seven must be disposed of, before Morales and his men journey far through the Sierra Nevada."

The nine Quixotes did not know Quesada was perched there, far above them. Long ere they crawled up to the overhanging rock, he had dis-

appeared completely. Yet they felt sure that somewhere beyond, among the snowy crags and moaning canyons of the Sierra Nevada, Quesada was pursuing his way with the girl Felicidad.

A day prior, just before leaping the Llanos de Jaen and coming out of the Sierra Morena, they had stumbled, in a hollow of the hills, upon a mud choza that had the gloomy aspects of a hiding place for bandoleros and moonshiners. The peasant and his wife who lived in the hut had said no to all their questions. No, they had not seen Jacinto Quesada. No, they never had heard of him, they lived so far away in the mountains, senores. Don Jesu, they would not know him from the great Morales himself!

But their half-witted son, a tall, shock-headed, ungainly lad, was struck by the appearance of the cavalcade and especially by the colorful, if oddly assorted trapping of Manuel Morales. Poor lad, he had never before seen such glorious caballeros.

As the disheartened men had made to lead on their mules, he had crept to the offside of Morales' beast and there, hidden from the view of his father, he had engaged in a quick, fearful pantomime.

"What is it?" queried Morales.

Vehemently the feeble-minded lad had pointed on ahead, on toward the Llanos de Jaen and the Sierra Nevada beyond.

"He has gone that way!" he whispered. "Si, Jacinto Quesada himself and a girl white as the snows that fall in these hills. He passed here two days since. Into the Nevadas, into the Nevadas, he has gone, senor don!"

Morales believed him, believed him even more implicitly than if his mind had been sound. Despite the dubious looks and shakes of the head upon the part of the guide Aguilino, all the cabalgadores agreed that the poor feeble-minded fellow would be incapable of perpetrating a deception. With energy and ardor they had pressed on.

Now, as they won to the bare-fanged wind-shrieking altitudes of the pass, Morales and his men felt dizzy; their stomachs churned, their heads were like gas-filled balloons. Sheerly below them dropped the narrow, profound gutter of the Llanos de Jaen. It seemed composed of three parts rock, standing on end, and seven parts air, giddying around in a stew. They drew their eyes away. They felt as if they would like to leave off clinging by their finger nails and slip down into the abysmal void.

They sank down upon the uneven spaces of a granite spire that was as a needle for slimness. Into the north rolled away, like a gray sea of mist, the massive ramifying Sierra Morena. To the south and ahead bulked up, even more imposing of port, the lofty altitudes of the Sierra Nevada. It was like some long and magnificent staircase, its lower steps of mica schist overgrown with gum cistus, rhododendron, and broom, its top a dazzling flow of snow. Crags and peaks, jungled windy cuts, rock-bound alpine lakes, creamy knobs, and sharp obelisks saw-edged the sublime blue like the teeth of some titanic rake. The white melting heads of old Muley Hassan and the Picacho de la Veleta looked but a jump away, and yet with the

mighty distance, the pink and purple of rhododendron, the white and pink of trailing arbutus and the green of gum cistus and broom seemed all of the same hazy blueness. It was a stupendous, overpowering jumble of cathedral mountains, colossal mountains, awful mountains.

"The Sierra Nevada has a scowling look," remarked Manuel Morales. "We may thank the good Dios humbly and gratefully, if we come triumphant through those solitudes and steeps."

"We must not lose another mule," said Jacques Ferou. "There are no red deer in the Sierra Nevada, nor wild boar, nor even mongoose. Is it not so? The panniers of provisions are our only salvation."

"And the mules may be eaten, too, when we're hungry enough," added Carson grimly. "I've eaten worse meat in my day in Death Valley, California."

Aguilino the guide heard the remarks without a quiver of his scarred eye.

Late that afternoon, John Fremont Carson halted his mule on the eyebrow of a cliff and the caravan crowded together at imminent risk of one or more going overside. His beast had gone suddenly lame, Carson said. It was standing on three legs, gray head drooping, and attempting every little while to put down its fourth leg.

"Carajo! The cattle must be shot!" said the guide Aguilino at first glance. "The contents of its panniers can be apportioned among the other mules."

"Nothing doing," said Carson shortly. "We can't afford to lose a single mule."

"You are right, monsenor," agreed Jacques Ferou. "In the Sierra Morena, the cabanas of the mountaineers were far between and few, and we succeeded in keeping our strength only by killing our meat as we went. Here, this Sierra Nevada seems as empty of men and wild meat as the deserts of French Algiers. We must save all our panniers, all our mules."

"Let me see the lame foot!" spoke up Manuel Morales suddenly. As are most bullfighters, Morales was wise in horseflesh and its kindred species. He crouched, took the hoof between his knees and examined it carefully. All at once his head snapped up.

"You lagarto, you lizard, you sly trick one!" he shouted at the guide. "What Gypsy trick is this?"

He showed the mule's hoof to the others. Slightly protruding from the inside of that hoof was the head of a nail. It had been driven straight into the quick.

"Come, you flea!" commanded Morales. "Get me a pair of pincers, a hammer with a claw—anything which will grip this nail and help to draw it out."

The guide, glad enough to hide his discomfiture, hurried away. But in a moment he returned with empty hands.

"Senor, we have no pincers, pliers, hammer—nothing of the kind!"

The American blurted out an oath.

"Think you can stump us, eh?" he said collectedly in English. And he borrowed the revolver of

Jacques Ferou, broke it, and emptied its six chambers.

"My automatic hasn't the leverage of your gun," he remarked to the Frenchman in explanation.

With the steel finger guard of the revolver he sought, as he spoke, to get a grip on the head of the nail. But the nail had been driven in so far that its head just barely protruded from the surface of the hoof. There was no room beneath the nail-head for the slim steel of the finger guard.

Manuel Morales shouldered him away. Taking the hoof again between his knees, he dug at the head of the nail with his bare fingers. It seemed a preposterous thing to do, but he worked with a gnawing persistency. The mule shivered in every member, and made hoarse, almost human sounds of pain. Suddenly it screamed. Morales, his round face dark with blood and shiny with sweat, his body hunched all in a knot, slowly drew out the nail between the vise of two strong bullfighter's fingers!

"Now we will go on," said Carson.

"And no more of your Gypsy tricks, you lagarto!" Morales warned the guide.

Aguilino ignored the threat.

"The hole is spurting black blood," he said. "Let me make a poultice to stop the bleeding."

He gathered a handful of the stick leaves of a gum cistus which grew in the crevices of the cliff wall, chewed them in his mouth, then spit the cud into his palm and pressed it over the ragged hole left by the nail in the mule's hoof.

Yet, for all the appearance of doing good, he

seemed to handle the painful leg with unwarranted brutality. The mule, snorting in agony and anger, recoiled sharply from him toward the brink of the path. Before the others could realize that anything untoward was in motion, before ever they could leap forward to save the beast, he pressed his head and shoulders against the burdened animal and it tottered on the crumbling edge of the cliff, then went over, turning round and round like an empty wine cask, banging its panniers against the rock faces, kicking the air with frail legs, and screaming all the while frightfully.

Manuel Morales caught the guide as he almost followed into the void. With his two strong arms, the matador lifted him bodily into the air and held him over the miles of emptiness.

"You snake in the grass!" he swore. "We will see now with how much grace you take the leap yourself!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE guide did not squirm. He could not squirm. He was stiff with terror of the misty abysmal depths below. Yet, somehow, he managed to stutter:

"Heart of God, senor, don't! You will lose yourselves—in these savage mountains—without me to guide you! You will all starve to death! Maestro, for the love of Mary the Pitiful, don't, don't!"

There was something of truth in what the guide said. Morales put him back upon the path. But he said with bitterness and brooding menace, "We will lose no more mules. You will see to that, eh, my trustworthy man?"

Aguilino worked more cleverly after that.

In the dusk of the following night, Turiddu, the mule led by Morales himself, went over a cliff, almost dragging the matador along. There was no use blaming the guide, Aguilino. He had not been near the doomed ass during the long morning and the longer afternoon.

Besides, twenty times that day the beast had come within an ace of its eventual finis. Since dawn, it had conducted itself in a contrary and restive manner; it had shied without seeming cause, reared and plunged forward in sudden frights, caracoled and beat the path with its hoofs, and whinnied, snorted, and shaken its head as though unaccountably irritated. It seemed a mule spirited and unrestrain-

ably stimulated by an overfeeding of oats; a mule intoxicated, possessed of a demon!

What had befallen Turiddu in the shadowy darkness of the prior night, Dios sabe! Yet the Gypsies have a jockey trick which might explain the whole mystery. When selling or bartering mules and borricos, they drop a tiny nodule of quicksilver into the long ears of the beasts.

Have you ever suffered a drop of water in the ear and been unable to move a hand to flick it out? The nodule of quicksilver is as irritating as that. It is wet and never still. It frets the mules and causes them to liven up their paces and seem more mettlesome.

Morales and his cabalgadores watched the guide with deep but indefensible suspicion. Vexedly they wondered and worried. Finally, in the next few days, they were provoked into savage anger when three more mules took it upon themselves to act unconventionally, and then die in fits, one, two, three.

These mules were thoughtful and discreet to a degree. They did not leap, screaming, off the walls of the mountains. They expired in their tracks and therefore saved to the nine Quixotes the panniers strapped over their spines.

Morales and his men became, all at once, coldly furious. The third mule in dying, coughed up a round, compactly pressed ball of pointed black-green leaves. Some one in the company had forced handfuls of oleander leaves down the throats of the three mules!

Now, the leaves of the oleander are extremely poisonous to man and beast. Horses and kindred

cattle have an instinct which warns them against eating the shrub. But man who has no strong instincts, often dies poisoned by the oleander's juices. It is related that several British soldiers during the Peninsular War cut and peeled some oleander branches to use as skewers for roasting meat over the campfires. Of the twelve men who ate that meat, seven died.

Even a creature as asinine as an ass knows enough to avoid the pointed black-green leaves. Most mules would rather starve than even smell of the plant. Yet, during the nights that preceded their untimely taking-off, some one in the company had forced handfuls of the poisonous leaves down the throats of the three mules.

For hours before the death, each mule had coughed. Also, each mule had simpered, simpered like a convent girl. Simpered is a strange word to use in such a case, but it describes exactly the way the mules had moved and worked their lips in a try to rid their stomachs of the deadly leaves.

Of the whole caravan of seven mules that had trotted so bravely out, there was left now but one sorely burdened ass. The nine cabalgadores weighted the surviving beast with some of the provisions from the backs of the three poisoned mules; they encumbered their own shoulders with the rest; then they continued doggedly on, thinking to kill the last mule for meat, once the provisions upon their backs and in the panniers were completely exhausted.

That night they bivouacked in a stony and savage ravine, and built two small fires, and hugged them

close. It was very cold. An icy mountain fog or *neblina* had crept down like a clammy gray ghost from the windy passes and frozen snowfields far above. One could not see much farther before one through the thick mist than the nose upon one's face.

They wrapped their ponchos about them and shivered in the damp. A cavern of snarling wind-echoes and of eddying, dark shapes was the steep ravine. Down the length of it, the fog marched like an endless caravan of ghostly, silent, gray mules. The two fires, robust enough and certainly well attended, seemed as pale and anæmic and cold as two incandescents in the black heart of a mine.

Without the fling of the twin fires, a man in sheepskin zamarra, alpagartas and voluminous mountaineer's shawl sat cross-legged on a large boulder and watched the men bulk before the flames, and move back and forth, and lie down, keeping close together for warmth. He did not seem to feel the icy chill of the fog; he did not seem to fear discovery. And yet, should the fires leap up and burn voraciously because of some knot braided with pitch, he would be disclosed most surely to the men about the flames.

For days, however, he had been with them and never once had chance betrayed him to the men he watched. He had clung to a risco above them when they had climbed like slow obstinate flies out of the profundities of the Llanos de Jaen and plunged into the gargantas and barrancas of the desolate Sierra Nevada. He had hung upon their flank as a wolf hangs upon the flank of a gang of

deer; as a podenco, or hunting dog, hangs upon the flank of a sounder of wild boar. While they ate, he had lingered near and, with a rare and pensive curiosity, had watched them slowly but surely exhaust the linings of their mules' panniers.

Suddenly, from the boulder on which he sat as quietly as another rock, he lifted up his voice in a long, thin, bestial ululation. Such a somber and unearthly sound is made only by the Spanish she-wolf when, standing above the den of its brood, it gives tongue to a thousand old memories and desires.

One of the recumbent figures about the fires lifted himself upon an elbow and, his face sharp, hearkened intently. Again, from the boulder, uprose the steely cry, mournful as a wail sent spearing aloft from Purgatory. From his elbow, Aguilino the guide lifted himself to his feet.

"When you hear the she-wolf give tongue," he answered to the inquiring looks of the others, "you may be sure that its den and runways are near. The young fat cubs make fairly good meat. I will go out into the darkness, hearkening to the cries of the bitch, and if I am lucky, I may locate the brood for you. God willing, we will have an oteo, a wolf-drive, at dawn to-morrow!"

He walked out of the radius of the firelight and went stumbling through the shadowy gloom. As he brushed through the white buckthorn, arbutus, and holly which sprouted in the more generous soil between the boulders, those about the fires could hear a swishing and snapping, and a regular-spaced crackling from the rich mould under his walking

feet. Then all crackling and rustling ceased, and the night was darkly still.

Aguilino halted at the foot of the boulder. The man in the mountaineer's shawl dropped down beside him.

"Rafael Perez," he said, "to-morrow you must murder the last mule!"

"But, Don Jacinto, I dare not! Three times already have they threatened my life, and they regard me forever with the most savage of looks. The others I do not fear so much, but that magnificent one—I tell you I fear Morales so that I shudder at each of his glances. The man looks murder. Believe me, Don Jacinto, he would shoot me like a dog should I make but one more move!"

"Then I must finish that last mule myself. To-morrow, above the Pass of the Blessed Trinity, where the three roads converge into one, I will send down a boulder to crush out its life."

"Ah, that is better, senor don! They cannot blame me if a little rock falls from the heights, while I walk with them through the gap. But how much longer must I endure their scowling looks, maestro? My life is not worth a peseta while I linger with that company."

"They continue to eat, do they not?" said Quesada significantly.

"Si, but it's no fault of mine. Don Jacinto, how could I dare send more than three mules toppling off the mountain walls? You yourself, maestro, told me to resort to the oleander leaves. Remember, it was in that little talk behind the granite crag? But the oleander leaves did not get rid of the pan-

niers of the three poisoned beasts. These Quixotes fill themselves from those panniers without stint, especially the Frenchman. They will continue to eat for a few days—"

"Hola, the Frenchman has an appetite, eh?"

"Seguramente, si! But when shall I quit the distasteful presence of that terrible Morales?"

"To-morrow at dusk, if you will have it."

"A thousand thanks! But what excuses shall I give, Don Jacinto?"

"Say to them that it is not the will of God that you go farther!"

"Carajo, they will shoot me for it!"

"Que, que! What of that? They will only cheat the Guardia Civil of another black rogue!"

Little comforted by the words of consolation, grumbling and shaking his head morosely, Rafael Perez, alias Aguilino, returned to the bivouac of the nine fantastic ones. The other, who wore the garb of a serrano, hurried away through the foggy darkness, his head bent and brow thoughtful.

The following day, as slowly they climbed one of the three roads which led into the mournful Pass of the Blessed Trinity, a huge boulder came bounding down from the granite heights, viciously leaped by John Fremont Carson's head and, having been deflected by a rock above, missed the last mule by a good dozen yards. The guide Aguilino swore in his chest, and no one heard him.

As the sun rose to its meridian, the vertical rays, reflected from the stony bare-fanged walls, gave off an intense heat, and the party halted in a hollow that lay brown and lean between two mountains. The

men squatted down to partake of a light noontide repast, and it was then that Rafael Perez approached Morales.

"Caballero of my soul," he said fearfully, "I can go no farther with you!"

"Disparate!" exclaimed Morales, jumping to his feet. "What nonsense is this! Hola, Ferou and you, Carson; the treacherous knave desires to abandon us!"

The Frenchman and American crowded up.

"But he cannot!" objected Ferou. "We will not let him!"

"What reason have you for refusing to go farther?" asked Carson, turning upon the guide.

"Senores," replied Aguilino with feigned humility, but no little trepidation; "it is not the will of God!"

"It is not the will of Jacinto Quesada, you mean!" bit out the American with quick penetration.

Aguilino shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Senores," he whined, "there are no churches in these mountains, and men of the good Dios come but seldom here. In these mountains, the will of Jácinto Quesada moves stronger than does the will of God!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Morales, with sudden understanding. "So that's it, eh?" And his youthful face cold and grim, he lifted his automatic pistol and shoved it beneath the nose of the guide.

"Smell of its maw, my good hombre!" he commanded metallically. "Now tell me whose will you will obey!"

Aguilino grimaced like a frightened monkey.

"Heart of God, Senor Don Manuel, I will stay, I will stay!"

They went on through the hollow in the northern hills. And Aguilino shook his head.

"It is that terrible Morales," he mumbled to himself. "Don Jacinto does not know him. Twice has Don Jacinto failed me this day."

They went up a dark green corry that looked like the hiding place of savage wolves. It was a narrow bridle path, a mere tunnel hewn out of solid rock and overarching foliage. The afternoon drew into twilight; a dim fresco held beneath the plait-work of lentisk, oleanders, and clinging briar; and then, all at once, the corry topped its rise and began descending, plunging down abrupt rock faces and zigzagging about the mountainside like the spiral of a corkscrew. It made the spine tingle to think that one false step in the darkness might precipitate one into the unseen murmuring stream far below.

They camped, that night, in a dell at the foot of the corry, not far from the constantly crashing stream. When they sprawled out to sleep, Morales and John Fremont Carson drew close on either side of Aguilino and carelessly dropped a leg across his legs, one from the right, the other from the left.

But they slept too well, those self-appointed bodyguards. What with the fatigue poisons that had been gathering in their joints and muscles during the long toilsome day and the many days which had preceded it, they could not hope to bat one eye in sleep and keep the other warily winking at the mat between. Quickly they became like logs of wood,

incapable of feeling and enterprise. And in some black cavernous hour of the night, Aguilino crawled out and away.

They awoke in the chill dawn, and looked about them with red-rimmed eyes, and spoke together in husky whispers. Without a guide, they were like the fabled babes in the wood. They were lost completely in those gray, echoing, savage mountains.

They breakfasted glumly and, with lightened packs upon their shoulders, went on. Now before them stalked no Gypsy guide; before them stalked an emaciated and bony specter that looked back to grimace every little while, and to beckon them on—the specter of Starvation!

CHAPTER XX

HIGH on a shoulder of the Picacho de la Veleta, one late afternoon, stood Jacinto Quesada. It was very cold, and his mountaineer's shawl was drawn tightly around his throat and knotted about his middle. About and above him frowned the crags and snow spires and sinister precipices of the sierras; below, splitting the mountain like a great clean knife-cut, was a deep, winding pass.

Quesada was morosely engaged in watching the peculiar antics of a number of men in a cove or pocket to one side of that pass.

Inset in the pocket, under a thatched pointed roof, was a rudely carved figure of the Saviour hanging from a cross. The sacred effigy was fashioned of some white pine, with a crown of black horsehair and dabs of red paint, in hands and crossed feet and side, to depict bleeding wounds. It was a homely and stark symbol, a shrine famous in the mountains as the Christ of the Pass.

But the men, despite that poignant reminder before them, were not kneeling in prayer to Heaven. They were squatting among the huge boulders in the ragged prickly gorse, their heads lolling on their chests, and their words, when they talked, coming in disjointed, never-finished sentences as if they were wearied and needed sleep.

They were the nine fantastic cabalgadores. They were starving. For three days not a morsel of food

had passed their lips. Theirs had been a complete fast from organic solids. That noon, at a mountain burnlet, for the last time they had drunk copiously of water. It had served to keep up their ebbing strength.

Now, however, they were suffering all the distress and tortures of hunger and thirst. Their stomachs yearned, but the gastric juices were dry; their heads ached and at times felt heavy as shot, and at other times, light and dizzy. They had been compelled to sit down. They were still too low in the sierras to come across the tracks of snow-capering wild ibex and thus appease their famished stomachs. They were suffering an agony, hopeless and cruel.

Starvation excites the imagination and causes giddying eyes to see illusions. It was thus with John Fremont Carson, the American. Come of light-headedness and fretted nerves, he had thought, all through that third day, that as they walked along they were companioned by a strange man who walked with them, now on one hand, now in the brush on the other.

Pausing for minutes to think, losing the line of thought, beginning and never finishing his statements, yet somehow he communicated his fancy to Morales. The matador nodded; he also had seen the shawl-wrapped gliding figure. But the Frenchman pleaded ignorance of any such illusion.

Of a sudden now, as they squatted about the shrine, aware only of the ceaseless gnawings of their stomachs, from up the road came the crash as of a

falling bounding stone. It was as if some one, moving along the cliff above their heads, had dislodged the stone from underfoot.

"It is he," said Carson, and he thought he added: "The unknown man." But the words died unsaid on his parched lips.

Morales nodded and continued to nod, his head wagging loosely like that of a mechanical toy. After an appreciable interval, he said, "He is prowling about us like a hungry wolf."

The tall, blond, mustached Frenchman seemed the strongest of all those once-strong men. He pulled out his large-calibered revolver. With none of the hesitancy of feebleness, he said:

"I shall go forward. I am the only one that can walk and see straight. If this unknown man is truly skulking about, I shall find out what he is doing up there ahead."

He left the pitiful cluster of men. Without any signs of dizziness or staggering, he walked between the boulders which bestrew the path. Bent sharply forward, revolver in hand, he disappeared around a turn of the road.

Abruptly, from beside the road and very near at hand, came then, loud and distinct, the sharp snapping of shrub twigs. The men squatting before the shrine looked about dully. Out of the gorse and bramble beside the road stepped the man whom they had seen following them all that day. He wore heavy rope sandals, sheepskin zamarra, a long serape and pointed mountaineer's hat. He was Jacinto Quesada.

Weakly the famished men reached for their

weapons; but he smiled with friendliness and commiseration, and sat down among them.

"There is no need of force, senores," he said. "I am here of my own free will."

The starving men looked at him as they would at a ghost, hardly able to credit their eyes. As he spoke, Morales reached over and touched him on the arm.

"My soul!" he exclaimed, the excitement of the discovery stimulating his undermined energies. "He is real—Jacinto Quesada himself!"

"You are starving, senores," said the bandolero, "or else you would never doubt that it is I. But I prolong your agony. Eat; I have brought you food!"

From beneath the voluminous folds of his shawl, he produced a bota or skin of wine and an osier basket containing cold sausages of meat, a chunk of goat's cheese, and some cornbread.

The famished men clawed the stuff from his hands. They were too hungry to pause for politeness or to think of thanks. They did not even stop to realize how incongruous it was that he whom they had been relentlessly pursuing should come to them now of his own accord and bring them that which they so direly needed. They thought only of appeasing the gnawings of their stomachs which had sharpened and become suddenly overpowering at the sight and smell of food.

They crammed fistfuls of food into their mouths and gulped the whole fistfuls almost without chewing. They ate without wait for words or breath, ravenously, like lean voracious wolves. But after

a little, the American halted, a stout piece of bread to his lips. He looked at Morales with eyes that were livening with quickly returning energy.

"Jacques Ferou!" he breathed.

"Si," exclaimed Morales, also pausing between a mouthful. "The Frenchman!"

"The Frenchman?" repeated Quesada, and he laughed bitterly. "Ah, he is well able to take care of himself; he is a very lizard for living on! He has not been starving like you. From the back of that last mule, ere I shot it from across the canon and caused it to drop off the cliff, he filched a loaf of bread. His distress has been even more severe than yours because he tempted his stomach without wholly satisfying it; but by nibbling secretly for the last few days at this bread, he has been enabled to keep fairly strong."

The men, their tissues, muscles, and nerves, undergoing rapid repair because of the nutriment they had taken into their systems, looked astounded and a little incensed.

"But why did he not share with us?" asked one, Baptista Monterey, a short thick-set banderillero in the ordinary tight-fitting black clothes of the profession.

"The man is a French crook, a member of the clever criminal society of White Wolves," explained Quesada with marked patience. "From what Felicidad has told me about him, I have come to understand the workings of his evil mind. I know what he is about. You appreciate, senores, that Don Manuel and this Americano, Senor Carson, both withdrew large sums from the Bank of Spain,

and that the residue of these sums is still upon their persons. Jacques Ferou has made up his mind to get this money. The man is avid for money. He means that you all should die, and that he shall survive you!"

"But he must be starving now," objected Morales. "The bread could not last forever."

"It lasted until yesterday evening," rejoined Quesada. "And this morning he accidentally cut his hand on a projecting rock. I was watching from the brush to one side. He sucked the blood from the cut, and that further strengthened him. It is odd, mis caballeros, but a man can live for many days by taking his own blood into his system. It is better even than water."

"But now," persisted Morales.

"Would you care to see what Ferou is doing now?"

They nodded with an awakening show of eagerness.

"We will bring him food anyway," said Carson.

Packing the now flabby bota of wine and the few sausages and bits of bread and cheese which remained, they went on up the road between the boulders at the heels of the stalking bandolero. Twilight was thickening. They rounded the bend and there, where the road slanted down into a ferny depression, they made out before them, seated astraddle a fallen tree, the Frenchman, Jacques Ferou.

They watched in a kind of bewilderment. The Frenchman's gray-coated back was toward them, and he was bending down over the trunk. He appeared

to be working with his hands at the trunk and carrying those hands, every so often, to his mouth. But it was all very vague in the thick twilight.

"Chispas!" exclaimed Morales in perplexity. "What is he doing there?"

"Eating the wood-grubs in that rotten tree!"

The men ejaculated in wrathful resentment. Said Carson: "So that's why he left the camp alone!"

"Si; the French pig!" from Morales. "And he would not tell us of even this distasteful means of satisfying our hunger and preserving our lives!"

"Despacio!" warned Quesada in a low tone. "Softly, gently, senores. Let us not disturb him, but go back alone. I have a deal more to tell you about this man. I should prefer that he would not be near to hear."

They rounded the bend and made down the road toward the shrine. As they went, Morales and Carson looked at one another. Then, without haste and very grimly, each reached into the osier basket on the American's arm and passed out among the men the remainder of the food.

The moon rose over the hills as they approached the shrine, and a random shaft, plunging down the pass, lighted the white figure and bleeding wounds of the crucified Christ with stark and ghastly effect. The men squatted among the boulders in the ragged prickly gorse.

"Senores," began Jacinto Quesada, "ever since you entered these mountains, I have been close to you. Every move you have made, I have watched; every unfortunate circumstance which befell you, I

have caused. I rolled the boulder down the cliff which was meant for your last mule. I shot that last mule, three days ago, from the other side of the box canon. The day before that, I commanded the guide to leave you. You did not recognize Aguilino; you thought him a Gypsy; but he is my dorado, Rafael Perez, who helped rob you on the Seville-to-Madrid!"

The men murmured their surprise at the revelation.

"But why," ejaculated Morales, "why, Senor Quesada, did you do all this?"

"In order that I might show you Jacques Ferou in his true light. Once you were starving, I knew the innate selfishness of the man would out. Then, if I could make you believe me in the matter of the Frenchman, I knew you must believe me in my whole story. Listen, senores, and I shall tell you the reason why I snatched and fled away with the girl."

Quickly then, Quesada sketched to them the story told him by Felicidad. He ended:

"You see, senores, I did not actually kidnap this old friend of my childhood. It was her wish. I merely took her away to save her from a worse evil, this filthy one, Ferou!"

Strong now with the meal he had eaten and strangely elated over the story he just had heard, the matador sprang enthusiastically to his feet.

"Senor Don Jacinto!" he exclaimed. "You are a bandolero of the splendid good old sort—the José Maria, the Visco el Borje sort! I knew it, caballero of my heart! You are a true Moor, chivalrous and brave!"

Carson, with the canniness so characteristic of the American, was not to be so easily convinced. True, for the salt that he had eaten, he was under obligation to Jacinto Quesada. He appreciated that obligation and was thankful to the bandolero for what he had done for him and the others. But what he appreciated, probably in fuller mete than did any of the others, was that Quesada was a man, clear-headed, far-sighted, judicious, and acutely adroit.

Quesada had convicted himself, by his own word, of robbing them of their mules and guide in order to bring them into a state of starvation. Once they were enfeebled by hunger and thirst, he had come to them with food. Naturally they were grateful. And it was while their hearts were warm with gratitude toward him that he had related the past incidents in a new phase, incriminating one of their number, the Frenchman, and very plausibly explaining his reasons for running off with the girl. He had sowed suspicion and dissension among them, what time he had placed himself, in the matter of Felicidad, in a good if not heroic light. It all seemed an ingenious, well-calculated, and bold plan.

"But," objected Carson, "but may we not see the girl? Not that I doubt you, Senor Quesada," he added with almost Spanish politeness; "but we have come all this way to help Senorita Torreblanca y Moncada and it would greatly please us, now, to see her and to know that she is safe."

"My native village of Minas de la Sierra," said Jacinto Quesada, "is only a night's journey farther up the Picacho de la Veleta. There Felicidad is staying in the cabana of my mother, and to there I

shall be glad to guide you. Yet I warn you, senores!" He paused ominously.

"What is it?" asked Carson sharply.

"Something wrong with Felicidad?" from Morales.

"Yesterday," said Quesada, "my mother died. She had long grieved for my father, but we fear it was not grief alone which killed her. We fear, senores," and his voice lowered—"we fear cholera!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE cabalgadores started in horror and a kind of personal fear. Explained Quesada with grave composure:

"In this autumnal season of sudden weather changes, it is forever scaling these hills, the cholera, and skulking into the pueblos in the night. When the rain sweeps down, muddying our water and making howling torrents of the dog trails, we cannot descend the sierras for the fruits of the plains; we must subsist on our few scanty vegetables; and the impure water and the poor, changeless diet bring on the plague. When the sun breaks through the squalls and fogs, the abrupt alteration of damp and dry stony heat aggravate the conditions. Therefore, whenever one of us dies in this season and there is no doctor to tell us exactly why that one died, we instantly think of the cholera.

"It was thus in my mother's case. The only doctor near here who will journey up these perilous goat paths and moaning gorges to help the poor serranos, is the hidalgo doctor, Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada, a grandee of Spain and Felicidad's own father. We sent one of the villagers for him, but he was away looking for Felicidad and for his stolen money. And my mother died. It may be nothing, senores; it may be the dread cholera; but at least, mis caballeros, I have warned you."

Questioningly, almost with haughty challenge, he

looked at Morales. The matador hesitated. He glanced at his cuadrilla. Whether because of the privations they had suffered, or because of the pale light from the chance moonbeams, or because of an inconcealable revulsion and dread, the faces of the bullfighters looked blanched and sharply haggard. The matador turned for moral aid to the American.

Carson was engrossed in a perplexity of thought. Was this but an obstacle suddenly contrived and cunningly put in their way to cause them to take the bandolero's word on its face value, without seeking further to ascertain the facts about the girl? Quesada had left himself room to crawl out. It might be nothing, he had said, or it might be a noxious pestilence. It could always prove to be nothing.

"We will risk the chance," decided the American with determination. "We will go with you to your barrio."

There was a noisy rustling and crackling of the gorse as the men scrambled afoot. Well, suddenly above the noise, from the foliage-embowered darkness up the road, exploded a voice of command:

"Throw up your hands, you Jacinto Quesada!"

It was the voice of the Frenchman. He stepped into the moonlight. Tall and blond, his ashy skin drawn tight with virulent resolution over his hawk-like face, his slate-colored eyes showing bright as an animal's, he pointed his large-calibered revolver at the bandolero.

Quesada obeyed with quick dispatch. Yet he found occasion to whisper to the others, "I have told you the truth, senores. I am altogether in your hands."

Whether they should intervene just then or allow things to take a certain limited course, the American and the matador were uncertain. How much had the Frenchman heard? Did he know that he himself was accused of crime, of thievery and abduction, and of worse than crime—failure to share with them while they were enduring the intolerable pangs of starvation? Was this but a bold move to retrieve favor in their eyes? Carson and Morales decided, all at once to wait.

Never removing the menace of the revolver, slowly Jacques Ferou drew near.

"Carson," he instructed with biting command, "you search him. He has my roll of five-thousand peseta bills!"

Plainly then Carson realized that the Frenchman could not have overheard Quesada's history of that money. This was but a presumptuous and shameless attempt to recover the doctor's bills!

"He hasn't your money, Ferou!" objected Carson with promptitude and energy. "He just has told us that he turned those bills over to Felicidad, whose dowry they were."

It was, of course, a lie. Quesada had explained quite definitely, in the course of his story, that he was holding the purse against an occurrence he dreaded. He knew, with a fearful certitude, that Doctor Torreblanca y Moncada must soon hear where his disgraced daughter had found refuge; and then would he come, stony of eye and agate of heart, to wreak vengeance upon her. Quesada intended to produce the bills, at that trying moment, in the hope that their appearance would have the effect of miti-

gating the awful anger of the haughty Don Jaime.

But the Frenchman, not having overheard any of Quesada's recital, swallowed the bait in blissful ignorance.

"Is that so?" he queried with a lift of his blond eyebrows. He leaped into a sudden and importunate impatience. "Let us go, let us go to my fiancée!" he urged. "Oh, I must see Felicidad!"

Said Morales very coldly, "Jacinto Quesada is just about to lead us to his native pueblo where the girl is domiciled."

"But I trust him not! How do we know that he will lead us aright; how do we know that it is not all a lie? Blue devils! he may have the very money on him now and be but leading us into a snare! Here you, Quesada! Keep up your arms! I will search you myself alone!"

But Carson stepped between.

"Senor Quesada has offered to guide us to his village," he said, "and Don Manuel, his cuadrilla and I have signified our willingness implicitly to trust him. You must abide by the decision of the majority. Ferou, put down your gun!"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. It was wise to obey; there were two and more against him. He stuck the weapon in his coat pocket.

But Quesada shook his head.

"I will trust him not, this Frenchman, senores. My offer was to you. If the Frenchman is to go along, he must go along unarmed."

"Mais non, mais non!" expostulated the Frenchman, lapsing in his agitation into his native language.

"Pues y que?" asked Morales sharply. "Why not?" And he snatched the revolver, with the words from Ferou's pocket.

The Frenchman seemed of a temperament to blow hot and cold by turns. He recovered almost immediately from his first fears. He shrugged his athletic shoulders. A man like a gutta-percha ball he was, resilient, full of elasticity, rebounding when struck. Behind Morales' back, slyly and covertly he smiled his calculating and very superior smile.

Now, following the striding long-legged figure of the bandolero, the nine cabalgadores pursued on and upward through the moon-shimmering night.

CHAPTER XXII

On the great rock at the brink of the village of Minas de la Sierra where, years before when he was yet a very little Spaniard, Jacinto Quesada had stood with his weeping mother and watched his father hurry down the mountainside on an enterprise of forlorn and fatal desperation, a boy in cotton knee breeches and bare brown legs, despite the mountain cold, stood waiting like some statue carved in basalt.

Behind him, into the dull gray wash of sky, the Picacho de la Veleta lifted its craggy head; off to the northeast bulked snowy old Muley Hassan, Cerro de Mulhacen, the highest peak of the peninsula; and all about, just brightening with the chill light of dawn, were the bleak spires of lesser mountains, shadowy defiles, dark and moaning gorges. Nothing moved in the leaden, glacial, desolate reaches save an immense lammergeyer that hovered on slow wings over its high eyrie like some black dragon of morbid fancy.

Presently, out of the gloom of a lower gorge, the shapes of men emerged into view and began mounting the fiber-line of goat path which curved and twisted and wound up to the barrio like a convoluted snake. It was Jacinto Quesada, leading the nine cabalgadores, weary from the long climb through the night.

The boy began crying out at the sight. It is an odd fact that sounds high on mountains lose in

volume, but gain in distinctness and carrying power. The cries of the boy that were more like the bleating of a helpless ewe beset by wild dogs, dropped down to the men in the gorge.

"Oh, Jacinto, caballero of my soul!" he shrilled. "The mother of me, who waited in her last illness upon your own good mother—God rest her soul!—my own pobre mamacita is sick! Last night, her stomach turned upside down on her, and to-day her skin is blue and cold! Save her, Don Jacinto of my heart; save her to me, and the Holy Mother of God will kiss your brow with fortune!"

"Hush, Gabriellito!" said Quesada tenderly, when he came up in the van. He gathered the boy to him, under one arm, and turned to the others. His young smooth brown face was priestly with pain and somberness and a great pity. In a grave voice, he said:

"There can be no mistake, senores; it is indeed the dread cholera! Like the great black wings of that lammergeyer of the air, it has closed down about my poor pueblo."

A little clatter of sound came from a yellow run of water as it trickled, after the old Moorish fashion, down the village street through an open stone gutter. In Minas de la Sierra, clinging like a cragmartin's nest to a ledge of the Picacho de la Veleta, there was naught else of sound or movement.

No old men mumbled endless talk in the cold sun beneath the cork-oak in the center; no shawled manzanilleros strode by with panniers of the white-flowered manzanilla upon their backs. From the

scanty forests above came no sound of woodchoppers, no steely ring of axe on pine. Tightly closed were the wooden hatches which shuttered the windows of the mud-and-thatch cabanas. Within, no light from the great open fireplaces cleaved the darkness. There was no laugh or squeal of children.

Gabriel, the village lad, unable to restrain his nervousness and deep fear, hurriedly led them to the mud choza where his mother lay dying. It was very dark within. Strings of pimentos hung drying from the low rafters. There was a bed on either side of the cold fireplace. On one of the beds the woman was prostrated under a heap of rags.

All sap seemed to be drained from her body. She was withered and dark-hued as a burnt match. Carson stooped and felt her wrist. The pulse-beat was an almost imperceptible flutter. Quesada spoke gently to her and, with brave effort, she answered in a whisper that was as the gasping of a wind through one of the boulder-strewn passes above. That was the *vox cholerica.* She was in the second and usually fatal stage of malignant cholera.

They left the boy lamenting softly at the bedside of his mother.

"She is a widow," said Quesada, "and all he has left in the world."

Their fears a hideous certitude now, grimly they went through the dying village. In a nearby hut, they found an old white-haired man altogether dead. His muscles were oddly contracted; one arm was turned round, the palm of the hand out and hang-

ing over the edge of the cornshuck tick. As very often happens after death through cholera, his body was not only still warm, but rising in temperature, burning up.

It seemed poignantly lonely in there with the solitary dead. They stumbled out of the sour darkness.

"That was Antonio Villarobledo," said Quesada; "a man who has long lived alone. He was almost a father to me when I was a boy."

Everywhere they went in the barrio, everywhere in the cold clay cabanas, Death had stalked before them on bony rickety legs, a chill damp on his forehead, his emaciated fingers picking at the coverlets of the sick, shutting their eyes to desire and despair. A great illness was on the serranos—a foul plague that caused them to double up with stomach cramps and vomit a gray pasty whey; that turned their skins to blue and purple and swatted them off, like flies, within twelve and twenty-four hours.

It was the scourge the nut-brown Gypsy Paquita had foreseen on the little white beach in the barranca. But surely she could have had no hand in bringing it about! Quesada had explained that the plague lifted its fanged and evil head wherever the water was impure, and there were errors in diet, and the atmosphere changed abruptly from damp to sudden heat and back again.

Yet the wonder remains how the Gitana even could have predicted it. To be sure, cholera was forever sweeping the high hills. Was her magic on the white beach, then, only a natural supposition, a bit of logical deduction and reasonable ratiocination? Or did it partake of something

more, something uncanny, impious and pagan—some real and diabolical warlockry? Dios hombre only knows!

But John Fremont Carson, the American, thought that he understood the reasons for the plague.

"What these folk need is education," he remarked thoughtfully to Morales. "Education can do everything!"

It was identically what he had said amid the squalor and squall in the Gypsy camp.

"Education, si!" returned Morales, even as he had on that occasion. "But what they need more is some one with a lion heart, a great golden arrogant heart, to lead them in the fight, to lead them up!"

Jacques Ferou said nothing; but again, despite the pitiful agonies and shocking horrors about them, he had the flinty hardihood to smile his calculating and very superior smile.

They came at last, in the course of their rounds, to the cabana where Quesada's mother had died and where the girl, Felicidad, now was living. They discovered her sitting up on the straw-matted bed, looking more wan than ever, a hot sweat beading the roots of her golden hair, her white febrile fingers gripping the side of the tick, and her whole ivory and gold form shaking like a mountain aspen with retching seizures.

Quesada cried out hoarsely in shocked and fearful astonishment. He sprung toward her. But a cramp seemed to bind her right arm; she let go her clutching hold on the side of the tick, and fell back. Tenderly the bandolero tucked a pillow under her

rich-crowned head and pulled over her a wolfskin from the nearby couch.

They came out into the brisk clean air of the morning. Like a blow, dismay had struck dull the light in each man's eyes. Said Quesada simply:

"This is the first stage of autumnal cholera. God grant that she may recover!"

"What measures do you take to relieve the sufferers, to counteract the disease, to wipe out the plague?" the American wanted to know.

"There is little that we can do, Senor Carson. Up here in these hills only the simplest remedies are available to our use. When a man is burning up inside and calls for water, we give him water—"

"From that cesspool there?" And Carson indicated the open yellow rivulet coursing down the center of the uneven street.

"It is all we have. Our fathers built that stone channel, ages ago, in the days of the Moor. What would you, Senor Americano? The nearest stream, other than this, is far down the goat path in the lower gorge."

"Go on," said Carson with unintentional brusqueness. "When a man disgorges—"

"We tell him to put his finger down his throat and to keep straining so long as a particle of undigested food shows. When his stomach is sick and worn from bowel evacuations, and wretched with intestinal pains, we put a plaster of hot mustard over his abdomen as a counter-irritant, or we rub his abdomen with penetrating turpentine. There is turpentine in the few pines that remain in the dank hollows of these hills."

Carson nodded rather abstractedly. It was as if his mind were divided between listening to Quesada and developing along a certain line of reasoning. The others stood close about and heeded in perplexed wonder.

"From the turpentine, also, we extract a form of aperient oil which, when taken in large doses, aids purging."

"And the ejecta?" suggested Carson.

"Oh, we cover that over with earth, or throw into a pit, or cast down the cliffs. When a man faints, we pour sour wine or raw mountain brandy down his throat. And if he would eat, we milk our goats and we brew up soups."

"But you do not use opiates to allay pain and halt the discharges?"

Quesada shook his head.

"Only Doctor Torreblanca y Moncada knows how to handle that. Ah, would to God that the haughty Don Jaime were here! He has a heart of blood for all the iron of his manner. And he has hands of gold for calling the dying back to life!"

"But why is he not here?"

"I have told you, senor. The bitter old man is away looking for Felicidad and for his stolen money. But Don Juan," he added eagerly, with sudden inspiration, "perhaps you are a senor doctor, too! You Americanos know so much!"

The American flushed with quick sharp modesty. For a breath, mentally but deeply, he accused himself of having talked too big. He felt almost as if he had been bluffing. Then the ardor and hunger

of Quesada's hope struck him. He shook his head sadly.

"I wish I were," he said with regret and genuine longing. "But all I know about cholera and such plagues, Jacinto, is what I learned in hygiene at college. I know, for instance, that what you folk do is all right, but not enough. You do not go in for segregation of the sick, hot baths, or opiates. You do not positively destroy all soiled clothes and rags. You bury the noisome excreta in the same ground through which flows your water supply, or you cast it over a cliff as a spawning-ground for flies. I shouldn't wonder but you bury the infectious dead!"

"That is according to our religion," said the bandolero simply, as if mouthing an irrefutable answer. "The men of the good Dios have consecrated a certain space of earth and there our dead sleep in the bosom of the Church and the Espiritu Santo."

Carson shrugged his broad level shoulders in a sort of helplessness, then asked, "Where is this cemetery?"

"Above—"

"Where it may infect the water ere it reaches you! Oh, you have no sanitation here! This is as bad as India!" He looked up and down the uneven street, at the huddle of cabanas to either side, in incontainable disrelish and vast pity.

"Senor Carson," said Quesada impulsively, "you and Don Manuel and his cuadrilla have done a wrong in pursuing me. Down before the shrine of the Christ of the Pass, I showed you how sincere were my motives in carrying off Felicidad, how

great a wrong you had done me in becoming sleuth-hounds of chase. But now that you are here, there is opportunity to right that wrong. We need your aid imperatively! Help me, Senor Americano!" he exhorted impassionately. "Help me and my poor serranos with what you know! Save Felicidad and the others! Down the pestilence!"

The American retreated a step before the fervor of his plea.

"But I don't know, I don't know enough!" he protested deprecatingly. "I'd understand how to clean up this barrio, of course; but in handling the disease, I'd have to work all from memory, vague memory! I'm not a doctor—"

"Don Juan," interposed Morales, valorously stepping into the breach, "Senor Quesada has well said that we did him a great wrong in thus hounding him; here is a pressing opportunity to right that wrong. It is an act of Christian charity to aid the poor serranos. They are dying off like flies in a frost. They need you. Help them, Senor Carson; help them, and my cuadrilla and I will be yours to command! Whatever measures you find necessary to rid this pueblo of its scourge, that will we undertake to carry out!"

"And I," exclaimed the bandolero, with an ardor deeper than any eagerness, "I will go down these mountains to the casa of Torreblanca y Moncada outside Granada. Don Jaime is almost my foster father; I lived in his house once, and I know every nook and cranny of it. From the remnants of the hidalgo doctor's library, I shall secure, to aid your memory, some medical book containing a full expo-

sition of cholera. I shall read it and then bring you—"

"You can read?"

Said Quesada with a restrained but natural touch of pride, "My mother taught me letters when I was but five. My poor mother attended, when a child, the convent of Santa Ursola in Granada."

With no less zeal but more earnest calmness, he went on:

"What medicines the medical book tells me you shall need, I shall get for you from the chests and racks of the senor doctor. I shall leave word with old Pedro or the childish Teresa that, immediately Don Jaime returns, he is to come up here. All we ask, Senor Carson, all we expect, is that you do what good you can until the hidalgo doctor himself arrives. Mediante Dios, you can do much!"

Intense longing, a hungry expectancy trembled beseechingly in the eyes of each man. They felt suddenly inferior to Carson, dependent on his knowledge, in sore need of his aid. He could not kill that earnest hope and sincere, almost pitiful trust in him. With characteristic decision, he exclaimed.

"By gad, I'll do it!"

And in Spanish fashion, Morales added, "With the help of the Dios hombre!"

The Frenchman, listening avidly to all, only smiled once more his calculating and very superior smile.

CHAPTER XXIII

EVEN as his father had hurried down the mountainside many years before, even so Jacinto Quesada wended his descending way, that morning, on an enterprise of forlorn desperation. He was bound for the casa of Torreblanca y Moncada outside Granada. He did not wait to borrow one of the village mules which the serranos used to sleigh their cords of pine down to the lower torrents and to carry their panniers of white-flowered manzanilla into the towns of the plains. His long mountaineer's legs were swifter to move and even more tireless than the slow hoofs of any stupid borrico. His descent proved far more rapid than had been the arduous climb of the nine cabalgadores.

He came, in the noontide, to the boulder-strewn, gorse-whelmed pocket of the Christ of the Pass. He paused neither to rest nor to eat. In the moon of that evening, he found himself in the forested dell at the foot of that dark green corry which snaked over a shoulder of the sierras. Here in the night, almost a week before, Aguilina the guide had deserted Morales and his men.

Quesada turned aside from his decurrent course. He broke through the moon-filtering brush of the dell. He waded the nearby frothing and echoing mountain stream. All the while, louder than the splash and chop of the boisterous rivulet, he ululated

shrilly in the mournful manner of the Spanish she-wolf.

Presently, from the underwood beyond, came an answering call. It was a singular bird note, not much the ordinary hoot of an owl, but more a growl and something of a gruff scream. It was the hoot of the eagle owl.

Quesada pressed forward. He came out, a moment later, upon a tiny clearing, saffron in the moonlight. To one side stood a log hut, its chinks plastered with adobe. Crowded in the open doorway were three men. They were his dorados, Ignacio Garcia, Pio Estrada, and Rafael Perez.

To judge from this, Perez had not fled so far, after all. The other two must have recently come up. Perez lacked altogether now the yellow scar that had so hideously distinguished Aguilino the guide.

Quesada showed no surprise. It was as if he had thoroughly expected to find them there.

"Hola, mis dorados!" he called, as he stepped into the clearing. "Bring forward one of your nags."

"But the booty!" objected Rafael Perez, whilom Aguilino.

"Si; the sacks of mail and jewels and money!"

"Do we not go forward to the cache now," asked Garcia, "and split the loot between us?"

"Disparate! I have no time. The plunder is cached with our cacique, Dionisio Almazarron, in the foothills of the Sierra Morena. Go you there, you three, and take it all. But alto! first get me one of your cobs to ride down into Granada."

No one of the three men moved. Said Pio Estrada in an odd voice:

"Ah, you do not care for this little treasure, eh, maestro? Times have been good to you in Spain. Don Jacinto has taken to enterprising abroad, single-handed, and accomplishing marvelous and audacious feats. It is true indeed that Don Jacinto is brave, brave as the very God himself!"

Quesada did not understand the significance of the words, but there was no mistaking their intent. There was that in the tone of Estrada's voice and in the fact that the men still stood unmoving in the doorway, in sullen disobedience to his command, which spelled sedition and revolt. Slowly from his holster, Quesada lifted his huge long-barreled revolver.

"My golden ones," he said quietly, "you do not hear well in the moonlight. Would you understand better the detonation of a pistol?" He smiled, showing his clean white teeth.

The grim jest of his words, the set of his long jaw, the gleam of eyes and teeth and steely revolver, had a decided effect upon the men. Like cats frightened away by the Spanish scat, zape! they stretched their legs around the cabin and out of sight.

Within a trice, they were back, each leading a wiry rough-coated pony. Quesada selected the most mettlesome and leaped into the deep saddle.

"Rafael Perez," he instructed, turning partly round, "you shall remain here. Let the others go for the loot. You watch the road. Men of the Guardia Civil will be riding the hills. When I pass

here again, in returning from Granada, I shall hoot like the eagle owl and you will answer in the manner of the wolf bitch. Let me know, then, if any policemen come this way. By this time, the affair of the Seville-to-Madrid must be loudly bruited abroad in Spain. I should not wonder if some two Guardias Civiles will ride over this corry in an attempt to capture me in my own village."

Perez grunted in ill-concealed distaste of the task. Ignacio Garcia spoke out.

"There are many other things loudly bruited abroad in Spain, these days, maestro mio!"

Quesada swung completely around in the saddle to face the sullen trio.

"Carajo! Do you think to trifle with Jacinto Quesada! What is all this muttering going on here?"

Garcia shrugged his shoulders noncommittally and a bit fearfully; the erstwhile Aguilino remained taciturn and lowering of dark brow; but with a strange audacity that was almost insolence, Estrada ventured:

"Oh, you will soon learn, Don Jacinto of the high hand!"

Quesada cursed them angrily for the whelps of dogs; then swung round in the saddle, dug his heels into the horse's flanks, and headed full-tilt through the brush. Once back in the trampled band of heath and brambles, which was the road through the dell, he sped the nag at a gallop up the dark green corry.

But topping the rise and dropping down on the other side, he reined in the cob the better to recon-

sider the sullen manner and incomprehensible words of his trio of dorados.

"The knaves have been bitten by some foul plan," he surmised. "It is not that they intend to rob me of all share in the booty. Seguramente, no! I told them they were welcome to the entire lot. Something else is afoot, God knows what!"

Coming out of the mournful Pass of the Blessed Trinity, some time later, he took that one of the three roads which diverged most sharply from the course pursued by the cabalgadores in climbing up. After a good time more, he rode through the myrtle and orange trees of the Alpujarras and, following the Darro, slanted down toward the Moorish city of Granada, gleaming white on the sides of the hills.

A few miles outside the city, upon the great hasped door of the crumbling adobe casa of Torreblanca y Moncada, Quesada knocked echoingly. After an appreciable space, the little mullion window in the door was opened, and an old white-haired man peered out with bright eyes. He was Pedro, the butler.

"Ah, Mother of God!" he exclaimed, a strange quavering note in his voice. "It is Jacinto Quesada about whom all Spain talks!"

"I bring news of the little Felicidad."

"God grant it is good news!"

"Good and bad. She is safe in my native pueblo, but she is sick. She is sick of the same disease that killed off my own poor mother only a few days ago. It is a plague, Tio Pedro. The whole village is sick with the dread cholera."

The old servant ejaculated in horror.

"It is the hand of God, Jacintito!" he went on with warning sententiousness. "It is a scourge of God striking down those about you because of the terrible vile things you have been doing, these last nights, throughout the peninsula. Take heed, Jacintito mio; take heed ere it is too late, and all you love are dead!"

There was something in the old man's words which sounded startlingly and disagreeably reminiscent of the three dorados, their sullenness, their mutterings.

"Disparate!" exclaimed Quesada. "What nonsense is this? Just tell me, tio; is Don Jaime still away?"

The white head nodded energetically behind the mullion window.

"Si; seguramente, si! Ever since that affair of the Seville-to-Madrid, the senor doctor has been scouring the plains and hills of La Mancha for his stolen daughter and all his money. Ah, Don Jaime is indeed a hard man. God pity Felicidad when he finds her!"

"I come," said Quesada brusquely, tiring of the old man's continual whine—"I come to get medicines from the hidalgo doctor's chest in order to combat the pestilence. Once Don Jaime returns, you will tell him of our plight."

Came abruptly the grating of hastily drawn bolts; the heavy door swung in.

"You know the house; it is yours," said old Pedro with true Spanish hospitality.

The bandolero entered the gloom of the corridor.

"I shall go to find Teresa," added Pedro, as he rebolted the door. "We shall kneel, and say prayers for the repose of your mama's soul, and for the quick recovery of the little nina, Felicidad, and the other sick ones. When the senor doctor returns, I shall tell him all that you said. And when he rides away up the steep goat paths to your barrio, we shall plead with Mary, the Compassionate and the Compassionating, that his granite heart may soften with pity for his little daughter. . . ."

As he left the whining voice of the old butler behind him and went through the long echoing dusky corridors, an orientation took place within Jacinto Quesada. Back through the years he went; back to the day when, a scrawny little mountaineer's bantling, he had put his puny hand into the great harsh fist of the hidalgo doctor and come down the mountains to the decayed, lizard-haunted, and dingy casa.

No longer was the muggy mansion the sumptuous palace it had seemed to his ten-year-old eyes. And yet every spacious poverty-bare room that he passed and glimpsed was quick and instant to him with memories. They were memories all of one sort. Memories of a pretty little girl with golden hair and legs round and pudgy as his own would have been, on that time, had his father lived and prospered. Unconsciously he found himself pausing in the gloom as if to catch a note of her rippling and infrequent laughter.

The shadowy library seemed never so vast nor so gloomy as now. Most of the huge old sheepskin-bound books were gone. The voids in the tall

cases, rapidly gathering dust, were as poignantly reminiscent as the empty chair of one that has died.

The bandolero went round the walls until he came upon that which he sought. It was a yellow-leaved volume, lettered in Gothic type, that was yet not so old. It contained much data on the various forms of cholera, its causes, symptoms, stages, treatment, dissemination and prevention.

Running his eye down the columns of print, Quesada discovered that he would need to carry many drugs, preparations, and aperient and astringent medicines. At that rate, the ancient volume would prove an added burden. Quickly he decided to tear the descriptive pages from the volume. They were all that was desired.

But of a sudden, he was arrested in his vandal task. Nothing real and tangible halted him; only it seemed to him that the screams of a child were driving like knives into his heart. He remembered, then and all at once, that long-forgotten day when Felicidad, innocently naughty, had torn some of the richly illumined pages from the rare old books, and cut them into paper dolls, and been lashed unmercifully with a short whip of horsehide by her father.

He saw himself, a lad of ten years, rendered desperate by her screams as only a child becomes desperate. He saw himself charging at the terrible hidalgo, screaming like a little animal, tearing at the doctor's trousers with his finger nails, trying to leap up and upon him. He felt the fall of the quirta upon his head. It was acutely stinging as in

reality. His jaws snapped together; they snapped together just as they had snapped, in that dim past day, upon the doctor's wrist. And a grim satisfaction tingled the edges of his locked teeth. It was for all the world as if, again, his teeth had sunk into flesh!

"Ah, you son of a mangy she-wolf!" sounded in his brain. "How's the wolf-cub to-day?"

He looked quickly about him. There on the wall he saw that which he had not noticed before. A painting of the doctor—Don Jaime himself, his hair whitened by years and by sorrow, and his gray eyes glinting out from his deep swarth face like remote stars in an intolerant heaven.

"Todopoderoso Dio'!" groaned Quesada, shuddering. "Pity Felicidad indeed when he finds her!"

With a kind of desperation, in one jerk he tore the desired pages from the book, then hied himself quickly out of the room.

"It is a haunt of ghosts!" he said almost superstitiously.

He entered the doctor's laboratory. Here, from chests and racks and trays, he collected the relieving and remedial agents praised in the torn pages—opium pills, preparations of starch and laudanum, ammonia, salt, powdered aromatic chalk, astringents and laxatives. Down in the cellar, he secured some cobwebbed bottles of old brandy and clear wine.

He made several trips to his shaggy pony, picketed outside in the road. He secured what he had gathered in the canvas packs slung from the saddle. He left without once meeting the aged Teresa or again bothering the butler, Uncle Pedro.

He returned up the hills through the passes and green corries. He shoved the horse ahead at a persistent canter, yet such was the grade and such the growing leg-weariness of the cob that slow days were consumed in the journeying. At last, in the dim fresco of a certain nightfall, he found himself back in that forested dell where he had commanded Rafael Perez to remain on guard.

But no chill ululations answered his imitations of the hoot of the eagle owl. He rode through the brush and across the stream. Back in the clearing, the door of the log cabin was swinging forlornly in the rising wind; within, was only dark obscurity and emptiness. Rafael Perez had fled with the other two!

Once again Quesada recalled the sullen manner and incomprehensible words of the trio when he last had met them. He shook his head gloomily.

"Something surely is afoot!" he murmured. "They mutter against me, they disobey me with impunity. The dogs of ladrones, they may have turned traitor! Instead of keeping an eye on the road, Perez may have put the Guardia Civil on my track. Porvida, it will go hard with them if such proves true! They'll never live to get the reward. Dios hombre, I swear it!"

His temper sharpened and embittered by the discovery, he vented it in harsh kicks against his pony's flanks. The wearied nag extended itself. By late dawn, Quesada rode into the gorge from which the goat-path looped up to the empested village.

Presently, as they wound through the gorge, un-

usual signs of alertness began to show in the tired cob. He lifted his head, pricked up his ears. He was just about to neigh when the bandolero, on the watch, leaned over and clamped his hand tightly upon his nostrils. From ahead, on the instant, breathed into Quesada's ears the neigh of recognition of another horse.

The bandolero leaped from the saddle. With one hand firm on the muzzle of the pony, the other on the butt of the long-barreled revolver protruding from his holster, tensely he stood waiting and hearkening.

Into his nostrils drifted the acrid smell of a wood fire. He heard a clipping staccato sound as of some one chopping faggots. He saw, some hundred feet ahead, a thin whitish smoke voluting up from the green tops of the pines and alders, and merging into the fog cloak above. There was a camp of men in the gorge.

His vague suspicions of the three dorados congealed into quick and firm convictions.

"It is the Guardia Civil," he surmised. And he swore; "By the Nails of Christ!"

CHAPTER XXIV

QUESADA led his horse back around the bend and out of sounding distance. He picketed him behind a feathery smoke-plant up the side of the gorge. Then he stole forward toward the camp.

He caught now, as he drew near, the clatter of tin as of men preparing breakfast, the tempting aroma of coffee, and the hot sizzle of frying meat. Creeping through the underwood on hands and knees, silent as a cat of the wilds, he came to where he could peer through an entangle of white buck-thorn and genista, and out into a trampled space about an alder tree.

There were two men in the trampled space. They wore the blue, red-trimmed uniform of the Guardia Civil.

The one holding a blackened frying pan over the small blaze of faggots was facing toward Quesada. His uniform but poorly fitted his squat frame and broadly uncouth shoulders; it showed palpable signs of having been slept in the night before. His heavy-jawed, black-mustached face was sweating copiously from the hot nearness to the fire; he had tossed his tricorn police hat off his unkempt head and into the weeds behind; he looked, forsooth, more the type of brigand than ever did Quesada himself. He was the apelike gendarme, Pascual Montara.

The other, with back toward Quesada, was busy-

ing about the wiry, coarse-haired ponies to one side. He was a tall man, his uniform as trim on his military figure as if he had not spent the night on the ground, and his polished three-corner hat set snugly on his head, white linen sun-shield behind, in thorough preparation for the day's work. As he currycombed and brushed the ponies, there was visible on one sleeve the red-braided chevron of a sergeant.

"Hola, Don Esteban, mi sargento!" called Pascual at the fire. He put the frying pan down upon the trampled grass and lifted the coffee pot from its bed in the coals.

The tall man turned about and, in full view to the peeping Quesada, came striding toward the fire. His hair, closely clipped, showed white beneath his hat; yet there was in him no sign of the weakness of age. He had a short, knife-sharp white beard, a face as lean and haughty as a griffon vulture's. He was Sergeant Esteban Alvarado, father of the lover of the Gypsy Paquita, Miguel Alvarado.

The two men squatted cross-legged upon the ground opposite each other, and ate and drank in silence. But Montara, munching prodigiously, kept continually shaking his ugly head. Finally he said:

"Seguramente, yes! It is the wild-goose chase."

"Pascual Montara," said the old man severely, "your talk shows you unfaithful to your duty."

"Duty, za! It is my head I use, Don Esteban. Did not the Americano tell us last night, from the great rock above, that the village is in the throes of the cholera? We cannot go into the barrio for

fear of taking the disease, and they will not leave the pueblo for fear of spreading it about the countryside.

"We have done our duty, mi sargento. We have found the American, the great Morales, and his whole cuadrilla. They are safe. And they can please themselves when they want to come down. Valgate Dios, it is not in our instructions to drag them into civilization by the hair of their head!"

"Muy bueno. But it *is* in our instructions to capture and kill Jacinto Quesada—"

"Who is not in Minas de la Sierra. I tell you, Don Esteban, that Americano does not lie. This is Quesada's native barrio, true; but he is no friend of Jacinto Quesada. Jacinto Quesada robbed him in that affair of the Seville-to-Madrid; for weeks he has been pursuing the Wolf through the sierras. He says Quesada is not in the village."

The sergeant chewed his meat in silence. It was a dour silence, as if he refused to argue, yet was not convinced by the logic of the other. Beneath it, there seemed an undercurrent of imperial anger.

Opening his mouth wide as he ate, Montara looked at him sharply, from under black bushy brows.

"Must I argue as I did last night?" he asked aggressively. "You say that we have them all bagged, including Quesada, in this eagle's nest. But I say Quesada is not there. He has not been up in this barrio for months. He has been swinging like a pendulum back and forth across the two Spains. My soul, he is like ten men for being in more places than one. If he were up here, how can you account

for that affair of the Despenaperros over three weeks ago?"

"I must admit that," qualified the old man condescendingly. "My son Miguel and I were stationed in the Pass at the time. Miguelito said he was sure it was Quesada who stuck-up the automobile and beat to death the rich Englishman. The Englishman's pale wife described the bandolero. It was indeed Quesada. But that outrage, coming on top of the holdup of the Seville-to-Madrid, must surely have caused the outlaw to seek refuge in his village."

"But it didn't, Don Esteban. You've heard of that happening in the Alameda of Valladolid on a night two weeks ago. While the people, bent on enjoying the open-air cinema, were all gathered on the grass in the hot night, he appeared before the large white sheet and, pointing two guns at them, brazenly called out that he was Jacinto Quesada. Then, while the members of the civic orchestra were playing some outrageous gypsy tune in obedience to his command, he slipped quietly away. I cannot account for it myself. He gathered no gold from the crowd. But sacred blood! it was bold."

"It was too bold for me to believe," objected Alvarado, shaking his head. "Tut, it is but a story of the people. They are forever building wonderful adventures and sentimental romances about these hungry dogs of bandoleros. One would think that the wolves were gentlemen and fine heroes, and we of the Guardia Civil only ratty red-eyed ferrets!"

Pascual vehemently nodded his heavy head.

"I know, I know!" he agreed heartily. "It is no

longer any honor to wear the uniform of the police in Spain. But what think you now of my argument, Don Esteban? Need I recite that shocking affair of the Plaza de Toros of Seville? The glamorous Moors of Spain do not make up stories about their bandoleros robbing brave matadors in the House of God. It is a lizard's trick. Since Quesada stuck-up the popular espada, Lagartijo, in the bullfighters' chapel of Seville, all Spain has been stunned by the sacrilege. And that was but one short week gone—"

Jacinto Quesada drew back from the entangled buckthorn and genista. His brow was ruffled as a mountain stream. So this was the meaning of his dorados' sullen insinuations! Come to think of it, even old Pedro down in Granada had been struck aghast at sight of him whom he had known from a boy.

"Ah, Mother of God!" old Pedro had exclaimed, a strange quavering note in his voice. "It is Jacinto Quesada about whom all Spain talks!" And he had added, upon hearing of the plague: "It is the hand of God, Jacintito! It is a scourge of God striking down those about you because of the terrible vile things you have been doing, these last nights, throughout the peninsula!"

Some unknown was sticking-up persons on the road and in far-off alamedas, and then, with bluster and insane braggadocio, announcing he was Jacinto Quesada! The fool had cold murder in his bowels! He had killed a foreigner, an Englishman. He slayed like a ferocious beast or a crazed man. And he had abused the sanctity of the chapel

of the bullfighters in the Plaza de Toros of Seville. The thing was unheard of. It was sacrilege!

"By the wounds of Christ!" swore Quesada softly. "The fellow is odious and detestable. And all his vile ordure is flung at my head. The creature is braiding a noose for my neck!"

Out in the trampled space about the alder tree, the sergeant's voice had risen with a peremptory note.

"Do not stay here, Pascual Montara! It is against all the code of the Guardia Civil, but zut! ride away without me, and you please. I stay here. Understand, hombre; I stay here! Every wolf has his lair, every bandolero his home. This barrio above is Quesada's home. In a week or a month, he must return here. I shall wait that week or that month. He can come only this way. When he comes this way, by the Life! I shall rid Spain forever of his baneful presence!"

Jacinto Quesada stole back around the bend to his picketed horse. From behind the cantle of the saddle, he removed those canvas packs which contained the drugs, preparations, and liquors he had gathered at the doctor's casa. He unwound the reins from about a branch of the sumach bush and tied them loosely to the pommel of the saddle. He broke off a hairy flower stalk from the smoke-plant. Then, with an eye to quietude, carefully he led the pony down the brushy side of the gorge.

Once in the dust-coated road which wound through the bottom of the gorge, he faced the pony down the way he had come and inserted, under the brows of the saddle against the spine, the setule of

flower stalk. Immediately the animal, irritated out of his weariness, began fidgeting, flicking his tail, snapping his head round on either side, baring his long yellow teeth and crinkling again and again the skin of his back.

Quesada stepped to one side. With his open hand, he struck the horse a resounding thwack upon the rump. The pony leaped forward, the bristle of flower stalk painfully rubbing his spine. Ere he could recover from the shock of the blow and pause to lessen the aggravating pricking under the saddle, Quesada snapped out his revolver and discharged it in the air behind him—bang, bang! Exasperated and thoroughly frightened, the horse fled precipitantly down the road.

While the winding gutter of gorge detonated with the hoof-clatter of the racing horse and while the rock walls flung back and forth, like sounding-boards, the sharp metallic explosions of the pistol, Jacinto Quesada bounded up the brushy side to where, behind the feathery wig-plant, he had flung the canvas saddlebags.

He was none too quick. Like a louder echo of the echoes sounded up the gorge, of a sudden, the crang of a carbine; then the thundering hoof beats of horses careering down at full tilt; and then the voices of men lunging up in the dread challenge and command of the police:

"Alto a la Guardia Civil! Halt for the Civil Guard!"

Quesada crouched behind the whitish-green thicket of sumach, and waited tense as a trigger at half-cock.

Around the bend up the road drove into view like a lean racing terrier a wiry rough-coated pony, hoofs pounding in a quick rataplan, barrel low to the dust, and ears flattened sharply back. Upright in the saddle, a carbine across the hollow of one arm, was the tall sergeant of police, linen sun-shield flying straight behind like a white guidon snapping in a wind.

"Don't shoot, Montara!" he called back from an eager keen-edged face. "Don't shoot till you see the hair on his neck!"

"Shoot his horse!" answered a roaring shout. "Carajo! In all our lives, we may never get another such chance at Jacinto Quesada!"

Around the bend, like a screaming projectile, lunged another pony, neck extended, nostrils blowing red, and the ugly policeman Montara standing a-tiptoe in the stirrups. Montara was like some wild Arab in a mad display of horsemanship. He swayed back and forth; he waved the carbine in one long apelike hand. Carried away by the lust of the chase, he shouted repeatedly from his blood-darkened countenance:

"Alto a la Guardia Civil! Alto, alto! Alto a la Guardia Civil!"

Ponies and riders plunged behind a huge brown boulder down the road and out of sight. Quesada snapped up. Active as an ape, he slung the canvas packs over his shoulders and leaped down the brushy side of the gorge. What time the stony defile echoed and reëchoed with the distance-dimming clangor of pounding hoofs and turbulent shouts, he sped, on his long mountaineer's legs, up

the convolutions of the goat path to the empested barrio.

The crang of a carbine suddenly spearing aloft from down the gorge caused him to halt on the great rock at the brink of the village. He looked back. He smiled somberly.

"That will be my poor horse," he remarked. "He has halted for the Guardia Civil!"

CHAPTER XXV

To Jacinto Quesada, returned after an absence of over a week, the village of Minas de la Sierra wore an inexplicably strange appearance. Gone utterly —mud and thatch and wooden shutters—were the chozas in which the widowed mother of the mountain boy, Gabriel, had lain sick and the white-haired Villarobledo had died. Where the huts had stood were now only empty spans.

Before the other huts had been built a covered wooden flume, as for the carrying off of sewage. Down the old Moorish gutter in the center of the uneven street coursed a clear quick stream with cold reflections and tiny gurgling noises that seemed to tempt one to drink.

Otherwise, nothing stirred in the chill morning sunlight. No serranos stood in the low doorways of the cabanas or hovered about the cork-oak tree in the center of the barrio. The village seemed a village of the dead.

Quesada hastened across the street, muddy and slippery from the heavy fog of the night prior. As he did, of a sudden from the direction of the little whitewashed chapel, there drifted down to his ears a continuous moaning and groaning. It sounded bodiless and unearthly in the thin air of that high altitude.

He knew thereat. Carson, the American, fol-

lowing out his scheme of sanitation, had segregated the sick. The tiny village chapel had been converted into a hospital. Within in the painful obscurity, behind those apertures that were now screened against flies with flimsy calico, men were moving back and forth on solemn and fearful tasks.

Quesada made his way into the cabana where he had left Felicidad. Inside, in the gloom, he found John Fremont Carson visiting the girl in the course of his rounds.

Propped by a pillow, the golden-haired girl was sitting up in the bed. Her cheeks were still white as ivory; but there was a brave new light in her blue eyes. She was convalescing. Carson was holding for her, with kind concern, a bowl of vegetable soup, thin and easily digestible.

Looking over the American's shoulder, she was the first to discover the bandolero. With glad and genuine effusiveness, in a voice that yet showed husky traces of the vox cholerica, she cried:

"My soul! It is Jacintito come back to us!"

The American got quickly afoot and shook hands warmly.

"Have you brought the stuff?" he greeted solicitously.

"Seguramente, si!" smiled Quesada. "And we may thank the bueno Dios that the senor doctor, from long tending to cholera cases, had every little thing we needed!"

He unslung, with the words, the swollen canvas bags from his shoulders and placed them upon the leaf-stuffed couch to one side.

With care and deep concern, Carson fingered and

opened the many boxes, bottles, and preparations. It was as if each were some priceless jewel. He made odd little sounds in his throat, expressive of discovery and relief and infinite joy.

"Here are the pages, Senor Carson, which will tell you all about the cholera. The book was too heavy for me to carry; I had so many other things; and therefore I tore these pages out bodily."

The American nodded and shoved the torn pages into a pocket of his coat.

"And my father?" exclaimed Felicidad. Perhaps to her, as had happened to Quesada himself, there was something poignantly reminiscent in this talk of tearing pages from one of the rare old books of the hidalgo doctor.

"He is still away," answered Quesada vaguely.

The American looked up sharply from uncorking one of the cobwebbed bottles of wine.

"You left word?"

Quesada nodded constrainedly, as if against his will. He could not say Don Jaime must soon follow him up the mountains. He could not look at the girl. He feared overwhelmingly for Felicidad, once her father should arrive. He was afraid lest his Moorish eyes might betray him.

Carson mixed a narcotic of the wine and a pinch of opium, and proffered it to the girl.

"It will relieve internal distress," he explained, "and induce strength-building sleep."

They came out into the open—the bandolero and the American.

"How many dead?" queried the former.

"Only three. Villarobledo, of course; a seven-

month-old baby; and the widowed mother of the lad, Gabriel. She died two nights ago."

"Not so bad," commented Quesada hopefully.

"No; but we got fully twenty sick, all stages. I must get these drugs up to them. They're suffering pitifully. On the way I can show you a bit of what we have done, and tell you the rest."

He indicated the open stone bed of the old Moorish flume, as they followed it up the uneven street.

"Notice how clear the water is? That comes from our filtration system. Up above, at the top of the village, we deepened the channel in one spot. We put a layer of large stones on the bottom of the pit, above that a stratum of pebbles, and on top of all, a coating of fine sand. The water, seeping through those straining layers, is purged of all foreign substances, thoroughly purified."

The bandolero nodded his comprehension. They made on.

"Morales and his men have proved as good as their word. With their hands, they cleaned the scum from every inch of that stone flume. Manuel himself is simply fine, a prince!" Carson added with that touch of familiarity which denotes the warmest appreciation.

"Then we made two cut-offs from the flume," he continued. "One supplies that box-channel near the houses to expedite the carrying-off of sewage. The other is in the nature of a flood-gate leading into a hole, deep as your neck." He smiled faintly. "Many's the time I've made a sluice of this order, when I was mining for gold out in California, but never before for this particular purpose."

"And what purpose is that?"

"Well, when somebody goes cold and collapsed from the cholera, we lift the floodgate and let the water flow into the hole. Meanwhile, we heat a bunch of stones in the coals of a fire. We throw the stones into the water and then, when the bath is at the proper temperature, we lower the patient gently into it. Hot baths usually give relief. In the case of Gabriel's mother, they helped to prolong her life. After the bath, we massage the limbs thoroughly to circulate the blood and take out the kinks of the cramps."

"You have been working most arduously, Senor Carson," said Quesada.

He was looking keenly at the American. Traces of fearful toil and many sleepless nights showed in Carson's face. His once square countenance was thinned into bony angles; there were heavy pouches under the eyes; and the eyes themselves were no longer merry, but severely, crisply blue.

With uneasy characteristic modesty, the American fidgeted at the canvas packs in his hands.

"Oh, yes; a trifle," he admitted reluctantly. "We've all been pretty busy. We had to shovel two infected cabanas over the cliff. The stream through the gorge carried the debris away. We've burned every rag and soiled bit of clothes and bedding in the pueblo. I tell you, I was mighty glad to help out in that task!"

He took the canvas packs in one hand and felt in his pocket, with the other, for the torn pages Quesada had given him. He ran his eyes quickly over the printed words. Presently he looked up.

Quesada had not spoken in that spell of time. He noted now a little frowning knuckle on the young bandolero's forehead.

"You are worrying, Jacinto!" he said, sharp as an accusation.

Quesada was startled.

"Dios hombre!" he exclaimed. "It is but the truth."

"But why? The plague? Felicidad or her father?"

Quesada shook his head morosely.

"It is none of these things, God forgive me, Don Juan. It is that I am worrying selfishly about Jacinto Quesada alone. When you mentioned the stream through the gorge carrying away the debris of the two infected cabanas, it set my mind back. I thought of the two policemen down in that gorge. Don Juan, they are waiting for me!"

"It is not that Jacinto Quesada is afraid, surely!"

"Carajo, no! I fear these Guardias Civiles no more than I fear the plague, and you know, senor, I do not fear the plague. The Wolf of the Sierras has become too long used to death to be afraid to die. But, Don Juan, I fear what these men say. They would kill me for crimes I have never done. It is not just, my friend, to be hounded for acts you never perpetrated. They would kill me for the crimes of some other man, a sneaking masquerader, a loathsome, brutal, sacrilegious creature! Mother of God, I worry because I do not understand!"

"Worry is poison," said the American dogmatically. "Every moment you worry is as if you poured a glass of poison into your system. Jacinto,

do you want to make yourself liable to the scourge?"

It was a grim warning. Quesada shook his head vehemently. He could not answer. A scream as of intolerable agony precluded, for the moment, further speech. They were nearing the dingy, whitewashed, thatch-and-mud chapel of the village. On the heels of the awful scream, saddening their ears continuously, now breathed a dull low monotone of pain.

They entered the sick bay. On either side, down the whole length of the chapel from doorway to wooden white-painted altar, was a raised platform of pine slabs with a slight pitch toward the central passageway between. Swathed in blankets side by side on the platforms, doubling up with cramps in arms and legs and abdomen, groaning in acute anguish, or lying fearfully still in stages of collapse, were fully a score of sick and dying—men, young and old; girls in their teens and mothers of families; and one little tad of a boy. He was the lad, Gabriel, who had announced the plague when first the party of cabalgadores had gained the village.

Quesada discovered a difficulty in breathing; he felt his head reel. The air was close and offensive with sweaty bilious odors and the sharp pungent smell of turpentine. He noted two candles burning wanly upon the dingy altar.

Carson had left him to go from sufferer to dying with the balm of his new-found drugs. When Morales came forward to greet him, the bandolero remarked;

"Those candles there, friend Manuel! They add to the stifling closeness of the place."

"They are a symbol of our religion."

"I know; but there is no real need of them here. They waste the precious air."

Morales smiled slowly.

"You and I would not need the reminder of the orthodox wax candles, Jacinto; but these serranos lack spunk. They believe they are doomed to die, and die just to prove it. The burning candles typify the living presence of the Lord. Their yellow flames hearten some to fight to live; others suffer and die more patiently in their wan presence—"

A hoarse exclamation upon the part of Quesada interrupted the matador. Quesada had noted, among the blanketed patients, one of Morales' own cuadrilla, the banderillero, Alfonso Robledo. Shocked and violently agitated, Quesada gripped the matador's arm.

"But this man! How comes he sick? He is a bullfighter, a banderillo, a strong man, muscled like a leopard, stout of heart!"

Said Morales grimly, "The pestilence respects neither strength nor weakness, race, profession, nor creed."

One of the cuadrilla attending the sick, the picador called Coruncho Lopez, paused in his labors to remark:

"Robledo is ill through contagion. Two nights ago, the mother of the boy Gabriel died. Alfonso and I carried the body down through the village to the lip of the gorge. Her clothes were infected."

"Oh, mia mamacita!" wailed the lad, Gabriel,

from his corner of the sick bay. "Now I am all alone in the world and sick to die!"

The bandolero turned to him.

"Hush, nino!" he said tenderly. "You have still Jacinto Quesada to look after you!"

The boy quieted. Gratefully he looked up at the salteador with black eyes that smoldered in deep-sunken pits. When Carson, in the course of his rounds, offered him a preparation of cornstarch and milk to alleviate the pangs of his stomach, he swallowed it readily.

"It is not safe to use opium in any form in the cases of children," explained the American to Quesada.

There was a sudden stir behind them. Coruncho Lopez, the picador, who had been nursing the sick, was taken with an unexpected and brutal seizure. He held his stomach and doubled up. In intense agony, he moaned, "Water, water!"

Carson hurried out to draw fresh water. In the short wait the disease made astonishing progress on the man. His muscled frame jackknifed with acute cramps. By the time Carson returned with the water, his face had darkened to a purple hue, and the skin wrinkled up as if it would crack.

They sat him upon the edge of one of the platforms, but he fell back. His body was all at once cold. He was in the asphyxial stage, all animation suspended, no beat of pulse, apparently dead.

Carson held an open bottle of ammonia beneath his nose. It had no effect; the man was not breathing. He forced brandy down his throat, but the picador lay still and chilly cold. He was dead.

Thus, swift and silent as the pounce of a condor, strikes the terrible cholera!

It was almost impossible to believe that the man was dead. Only an ace of time before, he had moved about, so valiant to aid, so tender to nurse. Death had come too cruelly abrupt. It was appalling.

Carson looked about in the sudden and apprehensive silence. He did not note the tall athletic form of the Frenchman darkening on the moment the doorway. His blue eyes were blunted, somber with gloom; his rugged face was very gray.

"That proves it," Carson said. "This man got the plague from carrying out the contagious body of that boy's mother. There'll be no more carrying of dead bodies down the cliffside to cast into the stream. It isn't right to us to have to bear the infected dead so far; it isn't right to the serranos in the hills below that their stream should float diseased bodies and make them liable to the epidemic. With this death, we'll change our methods. We'll cremate the bodies, immediately below here, on the great rock of the village!"

Mutterings of dissent, abhorrence, and strong condemnation went up from the men of the cuadrilla who were assisting in the hospital. Even some of the convalescing and slightly sick rose up in their blankets to express disapproval and fearful apprehension. Their religious scruples were shocked, outraged. Cremation was to them contrary to the practices of their religion.

They did not know that the tenets of their religion —like the tenets of any professedly divine religion,

or the statutes of any confessedly human law—were capable of drastic and remarkable innovations under the stress of necessity. They believed that their system of sacred services was without elasticity, firm and inexorable.

They were only ignorant. Never had most of them heard of pronunciamientos, papal bulls, nuncio rescripta which, when it was not only fit, but expedient and profitable so to do, had changed, remolded, or altogether cast out certain rites and dogmas. They were not so much devotedly pious. They were hidebound, superstitiously fearful.

Jacques Ferou, halted in the doorway, observed all with his slate-colored, calculating eyes. Slowly he smiled his superior and peculiar smile; then turned away and made for the cabanas which still sheltered well men. An insidious drama was afoot.

CHAPTER XXVI

CARSON paid no heed to the mutterings all about him. Alone and unassisted, he swathed the body in a new clean blanket.

"That will stop communication of the disease from the body to the bearers," he said. He surveyed the group about him. "Now, who will carry out the dead?"

The men looked at one another. No one stepped forward to volunteer.

Jacinto Quesada, standing in the background, sensed immediately, then, to what a stage things had come. He elbowed through the throng. Quietly he picked up the blanket-swathed figure.

"Senor Carson," he said, as he turned around, the form of the picador held before him in his arms; "you are doing the correct thing. Cremation is the sanitary expedient."

The American thanked him with his eyes. He followed Quesada out the doorway. They went down the uneven village street. The men of the cuadrilla trooped after. From the cabanas on either hand serranos, stirred up by the insidious Ferou, crept out like wolves stretching forth from their dens.

Carson never looked back. He could hear the men muttering behind him; he realized some dark scheme was pulsing in their brains; yet he never looked back. He strode, at the head of all that mut-

tering milling throng, down the street toward the rock.

As they neared the rock, suddenly he swung about. The men stopped, huddled back from him.

"Get wood!" he shouted. "Anything inflammable!"

The men shoved forward, crowded together, and eyed him with furtive, wily eyes. No one moved to obey.

"Go ahead, Don Juan!" shouted a voice from behind. "I'll collect the wood!"

It was Manuel Morales, proving bigger in the emergency than any superstitious dread. A deep-throated muttering went up from the men. But his quick courageous action had robbed them, for the moment, of that focus of interest, anger, and insubordination which leads to mob violence.

Carson swung round to start on again. As he did, he saw that Quesada, behind his back, had deposited the dead burden upon the muddy ground and was stooping and cupping up water from the old Moorish flume to quench his hot thirst.

"Stop!" he cried, his voice chill with warning and terrible dread. "Jacinto, you are in a sweat! Don't you know that copious drinking of cold water while in this condition is one of the direct causes of cholera!"

Quesada stepped back, momentarily aghast. The sweat quickened and poured from his brown youthful face. Suddenly he laughed.

"It is no importa," he said, with returned calmness. He strode on under the weight of his gruesome burden.

Carson followed at his heels and, at the heels of the American, straggled like so many famished wolves, the men of the cuadrilla and the serranos of the pueblo.

Quesada was in haste to deposit the body upon the rock. He felt a strange dizziness in his head. He did not want to admit it, yet he feared it foretokened an attack of the pestilence. At this crucial time, he did not want the dizziness to show in his actions. That would evidence the plague. And were the men to note it, they would think it the hand of God striking him down for aiding in the cremation. It would precipitate them into some insensate and ferocious act.

He held himself severely erect. There were spots dancing before his eyes, yet he made out that one of the cuadrilla, a short thick-set banderillero named Baptista Monterey, had stepped forward from the mob. The banderillero, his ordinary black street clothes rendering him inconspicuous in the mob, had been standing quietly alongside the tall blond Frenchman. It was Ferou himself who had shoved him forward. The man spoke.

"You cannot burn the body, senor caballero of my heart! Cremation is a desecration of the earthly vessel of the soul. It is against our religion!"

"Jacinto Quesada himself has given you the reason for the need of it," returned Carson coldly. "Cremation is the sanitary expedient."

"But the body belongs to the Espiritu Santo! You cannot—"

"What is this, Baptista Monterey!" came a new voice, an astonished and wrathful voice.

Quesada found himself unable to see its owner. An opaque blackness was fogging his eyes. But he knew that the voice belonged to Manuel Morales.

"Put down the wood, Manuel!" he heard Carson say. There was a strange note in the American's voice, a grim metallic note. "Go away. Get more wood, Manuel. Leave me alone. They tell me I cannot burn the dead. They are rebellious. I'll show them!"

Quesada gripped himself that he might hear on. There was a rushing and pounding of blood in his ears. The voices seemed fainting low and dim with distance, as if the speakers were drifting away from him.

"Senor Carson," feebly he heard Morales say, "this is your affair, but I am stanchly behind you. When you took up this task of cleansing the scourge from the barrio, I said that Manuel Morales and all his cuadrilla would be yours to command. It is so; they *are* yours; they must obey you! I go away; I leave them to you. Do with them what you will. Teach them!"

Like the noise of a remote waterfall came to Quesada's ears a muffled crash. It might have been the sudden casting upon the rock of a bundle of faggots. He only knew, of a sudden and all at once, that he was reeling. The water he had drunk seemed turned to liquid fire; his stomach was burning up, his whole tottering frame was burning up!

As from far away, he heard a shout. He could not see.

"Heart of God—look! Jacinto Quesada! He is falling! He has got it, he has got it!"

Quesada felt himself pitching forward and falling, falling, falling as if from one of the cinder-gray precipices of the sierras. A rush of sound boomed in his ears:

"It is the hand of God! Aupa, aupa! It is a divine sign that we are right! Porvida, men! Down the sacrilegious Americano! Sweep him from the rock! Kill him, kill him! He must not burn our dead!"

A tremendous sound seemed to burst the membranes of the bandolero's ears. Perhaps it was the report of an automatic. At any rate, as if a bullet had thudded on his own frontal bone, he felt a sudden dazzling crash against his forehead. He had banged down upon the rock!

CHAPTER XXVII

JOHN FREMONT CARSON stood upon the great rock at the brink of the village and surveyed, above the ugly snub nose of his automatic, the surge of men before him. One shot from that automatic had garroted the rebellion. At his feet sprawled the short thick-set form of Baptista Monterey, a tiny flaming crater in his right temple where a steel-jacketed bullet had found his life.

Behind Carson lay Jacinto Quesada, stricken and spread-eagled from the plague. The men stood staggered and cowed before him, fascinated with fear and deep awe.

"Quick, one of you!" exploded the American. "Carry Quesada to the sick bay!"

There was a sudden stir among the apprehensively huddled men. The tall gray-suited Frenchman stepped forward.

"Allow me, monsenor."

With a gentle concern, astonishing from him, he rolled the long-legged form of the bandolero snugly in his serape and then, staggering under the weight, leaden with unconsciousness, started off up the uneven street toward the chapel.

Carson flourished his automatic.

"Pronto!" he yelled. "Into your huts, you serranos! You of the cuadrilla, back to your work in the hospital!"

The men dispersed like a foggy neblina under the rays of the sun.

Ferou was some distance ahead of the cuadrilla as it tramped, bowed of head, back up the street. Carson and Morales remained on the rock, busying with the fire which would cremate the remains. There was no one to see.

The Frenchman seized the opportunity. With one hand, he reached under the long mountaineer's shawl that swathed Quesada's body; he reached into the inside pocket of the sheepskin zamarra. He drew forth a small mahogany-colored leather purse. That purse had once been his own.

Without bothering to open it, he thrust it into a pocket of his gray tweed suit. He knew. Within, in that small mahogany-colored leather purse, was the tightly wound roll of five-thousand peseta bills he had stolen from Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada!

When Carson hurried up, a short spell later, to tend to Quesada, Ferou was awaiting him in the hospital, apparent anxiety upon his ashy-hued face.

"Monsenor Carson," he said deferentially, "today must have taught you a lesson. It is not wise that these bullfighters and serranos should be armed. They might rise again. I would some advice give you. Collect all the arms in the barrio and keep them under your own hand."

The suggestion met with accord from the American. Readily he could see its precautionary value against future rebellion.

"Just a little, and I'll be finished doing all I can for Jacinto; then I'll be with you."

Together they made a round of the cabanas. They requisitioned ancient muzzle-loading smooth-bores, Mannlichers, Mauser carbines, revolvers, old-fashioned pistols, and guns with muzzles wide as the mouth of a French horn. In Quesada's choza, where Felicidad slept and hourly gained strength, they found a modern smokeless breech-loading hunting gun, a cordite repeater.

They were tireless and microscopically thorough in the search. Despite the mutterings and scowls of the serranos, they seized every instrument which might be used as a weapon of offense. They collected Manchegan knives, navajas, razors, and even alpenstocks and shovels. Against the cork-oak tree in the center of the pueblo street, they made a heap of the conglomeration.

They had circled back to the hospital, and Ferou had entered to disarm the members of the cuadrilla therein, when Carson, following at his heels, made a sudden clutch at the jamb of the door.

"Hola!" exclaimed Morales, just then coming up behind from the cremation rock at the brink of the pueblo. "Sacred blood, what's the matter, Don Juan!"

Ferou slewed swiftly round. Both men, the one within, the other without the chapel, eyed the American in the doorway. There was a strange, almost hopeful expectancy in the slate-colored eyes of the Frenchman; in the dark thick-lashed eyes of the matador a terrible voiceless dread.

Carson drew himself up. It was a visible effort. His angular face looked grayly haggard; his lips were drawn tight over his teeth.

"It is nothing," he said slowly. "I feel a little faint, that's all. I guess the excitement of this morning has upset me. It will soon pass off."

"You must lie down, mi camarada," said Morales gently but firmly. "You have not slept in two nights —since the night when that boy's mother died, and last night when Robledo of my cuadrilla slapped under. You need rest. You have been doing the work of three men, of thirty men, tending Felicidad, doctoring in here, directing and administering to all. You must lie down."

The American made to stagger through into the sick bay; but Morales stopped him with a steadying hand upon his shoulder.

"Not here," he advised softly. "We are overcrowded already. Besides, for you to lie in this atmosphere, would make you more liable to the plague. Come to Quesada's cabana. Felicidad is feeling quite strong to-day. There is an unused couch there. Felicidad will see that you want for nothing."

"But Quesada—"

"I will take care of him. Jacinto is a brave man; he has the will to live. Everything in my power I shall do, Don Juan, to see that he does live."

With one shaking hand, Carson fumbled in his pocket. He finally drew out a number of yellow printed leaves that had been torn from a book.

"Here are the instructions of what to do," he said wearily.

Morales took the yellow illumined pages. His honest Andalusian face was grave with an intenseness of sincerity.

"Senor Carson," he said almost formally, "everything you have done, I will attempt to do. You may rest easily in the knowledge and conviction that I am carrying forward all that you planned. Your methods have proved good methods. There have been deaths, true; but never, in an epidemic of cholera, have I known so few deceases, so many recoveries. Steadfastly, with fortitude and without deviation, with a stout heart and an iron hand, I shall put through your modern sanitary methods. Senor, I will even cremate the dead!"

It was enough. Guided and aided by the matador, Carson stumbled down the uneven street toward Quesada's cabana. The Frenchman looked after the two, through the chapel doorway, and smiled his calculating and very superior smile.

When Morales returned, Ferou pointed out the heaped-up scramble of weapons under the cork-oak tree and explained what he and Carson had been about.

"If the Senor Americano thought it a good plan," said Morales with promptitude and decision, "I will go through with it. My word has been given in promise. Whatever Don Juan started, that shall I attempt to finish."

He entered the hospital. Within, what remained of his cuadrilla were watching and nursing the sick. They were now only three. Of the others, the banderillero, Baptista Monterey, had been killed in the rebellion on the rock; Coruncho Lopez, the picador, was dead from the plague; and another banderillero, Alfonso Robledo, was still numbered

among the blanketed patients on the platforms.

"Here, you peones," said Morales to the three. "Take off your guns and knives! It is the order of the Senor Carson."

The bullfighters darted quick glances at one another. They were nervous and suspicious. Why did the matador want them to disarm? What did he purpose doing, once he had them unarmed—punish them for their participation in that morning's rebellion? They feared to disobey the matador, yet they feared more the intent behind the command. They hesitated.

"Shed your own weapons, Don Manuel," suggested the insidious Ferou in a whisper. "Then the men will understand that it is a general order which applies to all, without favoritism."

"Dios hombre!" exclaimed Morales, growing irritated. "Must I coax my peones to obey the command of their own matador?"

"It is not that, Don Manuel. These men are only poor silly Spaniards who do not understand. They are afraid of your reason for thus asking them to disarm. If you discard your weapons, they will realize there is nothing to fear. They will follow suit. And you will have set the peones the example, like a true matador!"

"Disparate!" ejaculated Morales. "What nonsense!" But just the same, realizing that it was the simplest way to attain the end in view, he removed from about his waist the belt on which were suspended a revolver and sheathed knife.

Readily then the three bullfighters emulated his example. And Jacques Ferou carried all the

weapons to the pile beneath the cork-oak tree. Outside and beyond eyeshot, he saw fit to indulge, once more, in his exasperating smile.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CHILL and damp took turns about with rock-glare and sudden heat to aid and abet their deadly ally, the cholera. Thick neblinas, dank mists, and wispy rains cloaked the sierras, night and morning; the noonday sun broke through and refracted its rays with intense heat from stony gorge and crag; easterly gales or levantes swept down from the pinnacles and drove all away with dense snowstorms, abrupt and blinding, violent and icy; and all the while, inside the four mud walls of cabana and chapel, the barrio continued to retch and writhe in the grasp of the vomit.

Felicidad was showing signs of slow but evident improvement. Within the hospital, there was hope for Quesada's recovery, but imminent danger of a relapse and speedy death.

The bandolero was languishing in the third reactive stage of malignant cholera. There had come to him a surcease of the agonizing symptoms. No longer was there any want of pulse; his skin had returned to its almost normal hue; his body was once more warm. It was too warm. He was burning up with a kind of typhoid fever that kept him on his back and affected his brain.

He had weird dreams and horrible vagaries. Always was he the hounded victim of a terrible mistake. Pursued relentlessly by two beagles of the Guardia Civil, he saw himself, in one fancy, seek-

ing sanctuary in a monastery. Under the irrevocable seal of confession, his past crimes were forgiven him. He went from monastery to seminary where he achieved in all piety the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Garbed in black chasuble, he imagined himself saying Mass, one day, when a tall, lean-faced, white-haired sergeant of police entered. As he turned from the golden pyx, containing the Host, and raised his arms in a Dominus Vobiscum, straight through the lungs the policeman shot him. Like Thomas à Becket of old, he pictured himself falling wounded to death upon the stainless cloth of the altar!

Carson was suffering, meanwhile, all the agonies he so often had witnessed and so intrepidly had tried to assuage. He had caught the cholera. The excitement of that crucial time upon the rock had overstirred and heated him, and made of his body a hot forcing place for the virulent micro-organisms of the plague.

Ere he could be removed from Quesada's cabana to the sick bay, he was enduring all the intolerable tortures of purgatory. With that firm unshakable courage of the great-souled woman, Felicidad had offered, then, to watch over him and to nurse him back to life.

Alone of all the directing geniuses, only Manuel Morales and Jacques Ferou were left upstanding upon their two feet. Even the three bullfighters, who had been so helpful to aid, were stretched out on the platforms in the hospital, sick and wretched and wholly impotent.

The work had settled down to a fearful routine. More than once Morales fairly cleared the hospital of healed and dead, only to find, as he breathed a sigh of relief, that new cases were falling and filling the sick bay to overflowing and pouring out into the cabanas. There had been some hundred souls in the pueblo. There still lingered fourscore.

There came a day when the boy whose mother had died and who had wailed in a corner of the chapel, sunk through a slow process of harrowing ravages into the algid stage of the scourge. Morales carried out the little fellow. The boy was chattering with subnormal cold. Morales immersed him in the steaming bathing pool.

Later, returned to the sick bay, in making an incision with a penknife to inject into one of the boy's lesser veins a solution of salt, the knife slipped beneath the matador's grasp and cut his own hand. He gave the cut no attention. He did not even bother to bind it up. Coming out into the open, to lift the lower floodgate which would allow the infected water to sluice out, he plunged the wounded member full into the hot pool.

He was surprised but no whit frightened when, an hour later, a painful throbbing began to chase up and down his arm from that open gash in his hand. He attempted quickly to close the cut by packing it with a little salt. Then, shrugging his shoulders with incomprehension, fearlessly he sought to forget about it. He busied himself doling out to his many querulous patients copious doses of aperient and astringent medicines.

By nightfall, he was stretched in the hospital,

prostrated from the plague. The change in him was at once inconceivable and appalling. The man that in the morning had been so strong with firmness of spirit, fortitude of soul, and a large enveloping tenderness of heart, was now cramped with griping, unendurable pangs and as weak of pulse, voice, and body as an old, old man.

From having served so many sick, Morales knew what he needed. He called for a mild opiate.

Jacques Ferou approached the end of the platform. Save for two convalescing serranos with matted hair and irregular features who were now acting, perforce, as nurses, Ferou was the only able-bodied man in the hospital.

The Frenchman watched the sufferings of the matador with small, bright slaty eyes. The trick of the eyelids, drooping at the outer corners, lent him a calculating sinister aspect. He curled one spike of his straw-colored mustache.

"I will give you the opiate, monsenor, but you must pay for it! You must pay five hundred pesetas!"

Morales attempted to sit up. But he could not sit up.

"Wounds of Christ!" he gasped in a husky whisper. "What is this—a fancy or some mistake of my ears? Has the disease touched my brain? Tell me, tell me, Senor Ferou!" he almost supplicated.

"It is neither the mistake nor the fancy," returned the Frenchman in coldly even tones. "It is merely that you are a rich man, Monsenor Morales, and that you can afford to pay. These others are

only hungry serranos and underpaid bullfighters. Even Quesada there, with his feverish imaginings, is but a poor hounded thief. He has no money."

As if he were about to smile at some choice recollection, the nostrils of his high predatory nose twitched, the hard grim lines about his mouth momentarily widened and deepened. But he did not smile. In a voice that sounded to the matador like pulsing chill points of steel, he went on:

"But you, Monsenor Morales; you withdrew a large sum by wire from the Bank of Spain. It was when we first started on this little expedition, and it was so much money we were indeed astounded. Dicenta, the Jewish cacique of Alcazar de San Juan, cashed that order for you in many peseta bills. Most of those bills you still have on your person. I could take them away from you with a little force; but I prefer to give you their value in narcotics, medicines, and soups. Sacre, monsenor, life must be worth more to you than any money, eh?"

The black eyes of the matador, deep-sunken from the quick ravages of the disease, blazed up at Ferou as if they would sear and brand his ashy face. Slowly as he looked, clamping his strong white teeth together with the effort, Morales straightened out his contracted right arm and felt, beneath the blanket, for the revolver at his waist.

An astounded look that changed in a rush to one of stupefied dismay staggered his eyes. The revolver was gone! There was not even sheathed knife or belt!

Ferou watched the matador's eyes, his lids continuing to droop with pitiless analytical scrutiny.

Significantly he tapped the heavy revolver that hung at his own belt. And he laughed, a thin chill laugh.

"You forget, monsenor. I am the only man armed in the barrio. It was at my suggestion that Senor Carson went about disarming the serranos. It was at my whisper, when your cuadrilla hesitated to shed their weapons, that you angrily threw off your own belt and gun. I have hidden them all!"

He threw up his sharp cinder-hued face in an accession of pride. Just as, on the Seville-to-Madrid, he had acted with Felicidad, so now he seemed to swell with pride, to grow and strut with importance, as he bared thus his real repulsive self to Morales.

"Monsenor," he exclaimed, "you do not know me; but the French police have long dreaded me as an adept and fearsome criminal. I am a White Wolf of Paris. I use my brain. I do not conceive and carry forward a plan in the one breath. I lay strings long in advance, and then, when the time is fit and proper, parbleu! I jerk.

"Ah, you understand, I see! It is thus now. I am ruler here. I am the only man armed in the village. What I say—"

Came an abrupt and alarming interruption from down the slant of the platform. Quesada sat rigidly up. His forehead pouring sweat, his eyes stark in his head, his hands clutching his chest, in a frightful voice he cried out:

"No, no! I never did it. Kill me if you will, but by the Life, you must believe me! It was some other man . . . some other man . . . !"

His voice fainted away. With the exertion of

shouting, with the fear of his grisly fancies, his face darkened with congested blood. Completely exhausted, he fell back upon the platform.

It was as if the interruption had come to strengthen the argument of Jacques Ferou. Overwhelmingly thereat Morales saw how powerless he was. Quesada was out of his mind; John Fremont Carson was on the rack of the plague; even the peones of his cuadrilla, who obedient to his command might have aided him, were stretched out on either hand, sick and helpless. The matador was completely at the mercy of the Frenchman.

CHAPTER XXIX

One of the uncouth serranos bent over Quesada. To mitigate the fever, he poured some concoction down his burning throat.

Morales' tossing head came to an abrupt stop on the pillow. A sudden hope bourgeoned in his distracted eyes. He was like a man falling down a cliffside, clutching madly at an adnascent shrub. His eyes glowed from their deep sockets like pulsing coals. Here was help in his hour of need. His eyes seemed fairly to devour the serrano.

Ferou, watching all, bent sharply toward him.

"But you forgot again, monsenor!" he whispered. "You have burned their dead! You have transgressed the teachings of their religion, walked roughshod over all their superstitious dreads. They are my men, heart and soul!

"Ah, Morales, I have told you, I lay the strings of my plots long in advance! It was I who gathered these serranos and egged them on at that rebellion on the rock. I have whispered to them in the long nights. They believe all your sanitary methods are tricks of the devil which have aided, rather than lessened the ravages of the plague. The fact that the cholera has stricken you and Quesada and Carson is to them as a sign from on high. With the death of you three, they look for the lifting of the scourge. Sooner than aid your recovery, they would poison you!"

A fit of retching, sudden and violent, seized Morales. Ferou moved away. When Morales recovered from the griping vice of the fit, the Frenchman was proffering a cup of some darkish mixture to the convalescing banderillero on the matador's left hand.

"Here, Alfonso Robledo," he said quite loudly. "Drink this narcotic, and you will sleep like a babe. It is only fine old brandy with a pinch of opium."

It was just the mild form of opiate Morales craved. Ferou looked over at the matador with the words. He was tormenting Morales with the afflictions of a Tantalus. He went down the lane between the platforms, most solicitously dosing each sufferer in turn.

Behind the Frenchman's back, surreptitiously, the banderillero Alfonso Robledo proffered his opiate to Morales. Morales shook his head.

"I thank you a thousand times, my son," he said in a feeble husky whisper; "but it is not right that I should rob you of that which your debilitated system needs. We are both sick men."

"But I am recovering, growing stronger hourly. Maestro, you have just slapped down!" The banderillero became quietly yet earnestly impassioned. "Ah, it breaks my heart to see my brave espada so weak! I want to help. Should you die through sacrifice to me, I will not care to live! I am only a peon of your cuadrilla; you are the great matador. My loss will not be felt! Take it, take it, please, Don Manuel of my soul!"

Morales hesitated. But only for a trice.

"No," he decided with heroic stubbornness.

"This Frenchman can't have so black a heart. Seguramente, no! He is but teasing me to test my caliber. If I must, rather than rob you, Alfonso, I shall pay the hawk!"

"Eh?" broke in the thin nasal voice of Ferou. Unaware, he had returned and overheard Morales' words. "And you have changed your mind, Don Manuel? You are willing to pay? That is good! Now let me see; what was it you wanted?"

"I think your joke a little cruel, Senor Ferou. I would have you give me a mild opiate."

"Ah, yes; brandy and an opium pill. That will cost you now just one thousand pesetas! This wait, which you think such a cruel joke, Monsenor Morales, has cost you precisely five hundred pesetas more!"

The man was altogether inhuman.

"You hawk, you vulture of the slime, you bloodleech!" execrated Morales in a furious voice that shook through his lungs like a hoarse wind. "I shall rot in hell before ever I put one centesimo into your filthy claws!"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. His face was stiff and livid with restrained bile.

"I leave you now, Don Manuel," he said with acid politeness, "to visit that other Eldorado, Senor Carson. Perhaps mon Americain won't think so much of his peseta bills. And who knows? Perhaps the great espada will also change his mind by the time I return!"

At the door, he turned and called out bitingly to the two sullen serranos:

"You will see, mis paisanos, that Monsenor

Morales, who burned your dead, will want for everything and get nothing! When he changes his mind, one of you may come for me!"

He smiled toward Morales his peculiar aggravating smile; then, twisting the spikes of his straw mustache, swaggered out the doorway.

There was a soft thud up near the altar at the end of one platform. The mountain boy, Gabriel, had rolled off upon the ground. On discolored hands and knees quaking from the disease, he came creeping with stealthy quietude and laborious feebleness down the passageway. Half-tilted between rigid teeth, he held a tin cup containing a preparation in wine of powdered aromatic chalk.

He had achieved half the length of the runway when, on the sudden, one of the serranos discovered him. The fellow roughly swung the boy up under one arm. The contents of the tin cup was spilled. The boy began a frenzied squirming and kicking. In a tumult of febrile revolt and piteous pleading, he wailed:

"Let me go, let me go to him—to Don Manuel of my heart! He is good, he is brave, he is like the very God Himself! He is sick only because he helped me and the knife slipped! Ah, Diego Lerida, I have known you since I was born. Won't you let me go, won't you let me give him something to ease the pain? He did the same for the wife of you, ere the good Dios called her. Only a little chalk, Tio Diego, only a little chalk and wine.

"No? You won't let me go! Then may Satanas claim you for a gnat of a dunghill—you

and all your vile spawn! And may the Christ and His Compassionate Mother bring hope and health to my own brave espada—"

Came a hoarse shout from Morales: "Hola, my brave little golden one! I drink to you, Gabriellito!"

And accepting the lesser of the two sacrifices, Morales lifted from between the banderillero and himself the cup containing the partly finished brandy, and quaffed it down in one great draught.

He was none too soon. With an oath of commingled surprise, anger and dismay, the second serrano leaped forward and lunged at the matador. He only succeeded in knocking the empty cup from Morales' hand.

Save then for the feverish Quesada and those who slept under the influence of narcotics or the cold pall of death, the whole sick bay chortled with nightmare hoarseness at the frustrated and suddenly apprehensive serranos.

The hours snailed by. While Manuel Morales tossed and mumbled in painful slumber, the mountain boy watched him steadily from down the lane of blanketed figures. There was in his unblinking, deep-socketed eyes that highest emotion one can exercise toward another human being. Morales had called him his dorado, his brave little golden one! In his eyes was a reverence that amounted to venerating love, wistful adoration!

CHAPTER XXX

It was a strangely assorted trio. Over the lip of the great rock on the brink of the village of Minas de la Sierra extended the athletic shoulders and sharp ashy face of Jacques Ferou, lying flat on his stomach. Below in the gorge at the foot of the corkscrew goat path, straining their necks backward and looking up, were the two Guardias Civiles, Pascual Montara and Sergeant Esteban Alvarado. All three were deeply absorbed in a distance-spanning conversation.

"That Americáin lied!" the Frenchman was shouting down with heated earnestness. "Jacinto Quesada is himself in this village. He has been sick with the great illness and with a mad fever, too; but this morning his head is once more his own, and he is repairing rapidly in strength. He is here, I tell you!"

"Muy bueno!" shouted back the old sergeant with glad resolution. "We will come up for him immediately!"

"Non, non, mi sargento! There is the pestilence to fear, and there is also my revolver which barks no, no!"

"What would you, then?" asked sullenly that apelike one, Montara.

Now, so thoroughly were the trio engrossed in the matter of words, that their minds were com-

pletely monopolized and all other perceptions were excluded from their senses. They did not hear the clatter of a horse's hoofs approaching up the gorge. When that clatter abruptly ceased, their unheeding ears received no sensation of change or difference.

They did not know that, five yards behind the policeman, concealed from above by the leafy branches of pines and alders and from the guardsmen ahead by a thick underwood of tall buckthorn and entangled genista, a horseman had halted and now, leaning his two hands upon the pommel of the saddle, was observing them attentively.

He was quite a rememberable-looking man. His hair was white; his skin from exposure to wind and weather was a deep swarth; and his eyes were gray. Not many Spaniards have gray eyes. The eyes of Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada were a clear, cold, agate-gray. All in all, there was about his appearance, especially the long aquiline nose, the stony eyes and pointed white beard, something which seemed to hearken back to the days of ruffs and ready swords—the days of the terrible Spanish infantry, the Armada, the Bigotes, the "Bearded Men," the Conquistadores.

He strained his eyes through the greeny plait above him. Suddenly, as he glimpsed the man sprawled on the great rock, his narrow face blanched as if gutted of blood; a look of savage ferocity leaped into his eyes; and his hand strayed back to the heavy horse pistol slung from the saddle.

But abruptly his reaching hand stopped. A few random words of the trio's conversation had im-

pinged upon his ears and aroused his curiosity.

"There is something foul going forward here!" he breathed vehemently. "I shall listen. Of what use to snap off the snake's head, now and impetuously? Let him bare his fangs. With cold patience, even as the Christ waits for his Judgment Day, I will wait for my moment of vengeance on this creature!"

Don Jaime was a grandee of Spain, one entitled to wear his hat in the presence of his monarch. Well now, as he applied his ear to the conversation, his stony eyes filled with a profundity of contempt that none but a grandee could plumb. Carajo! this was no ordinary conversation he was overhearing. It was the bartering for money of the living body of a man!

Shouted down Ferou, repeating the last question of Montara:

"What would I, what would I have you do? Oh, a very little, monsenores policemen—I would merely have you attend to the simple matter of my reward. I will do all the rest. For the reward, I will deliver Quesada up to you—I will deliver him walking upon his own two legs, so you will not have to touch his infectious clothes. It is good, what? And you will give me the reward of ten thousand pesetas, eh?"

"When you have done all that you say you will do," returned the old sergeant, sternly noncommittal, "then, and not before, shall you have earned the ten thousand pesetas. But you need have no fears for the money! When I shoot down this sacrilegious swollen toad of a Quesada, I shall make

my report to headquarters at Getafe. Your name—"

"It is Jacques Ferou."

"I will remember, Senor Don Jacques Ferou. You shall be given all due credit. In two weeks' time from the day you deliver Jacinto Quesada to us, you can collect the reward by presenting yourself at Getafe. Most certainly, Spain shall consider herself the best off in the bargain!"

"Tres bien!" exclaimed the Frenchman, lapsing with emotion into his native tongue; then recovering: "It is good. I agree."

"When may we expect you with the heretical dog?" asked Montara.

"To-morrow at noon. When this great rock is hot with midday glare, I will force him out here, my gun nuzzling his back. You policemen can shoot him from below."

Vigorously the old sergeant nodded his polished tricorn hat.

"Muy bueno!" he approved heartily. Then in adieu: "Go thou thy way with God!"

"Always at the feet of the Guardia Civil who keep the peace of Spain," ended the man on the rock, after the fashion of Spanish courtesy. He withdrew from view, thereupon, much as a turtle's head withdraws from view between its carapax and plastron shells.

Don Jaime crashed his rawboned old horse through the tall buckthorn and entangled genista.

"Alto a la Guardia Civil!" thundered Montara, springing back and jerking his carbine to his shoulder.

"Down, you apelike one!" commanded the aged sergeant. "Can't you see? It is the hidalgo doctor, Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada!" And he swept his tricorn hat off his close-clipped white head.

Don Jaime reined in his horse to a quick stop. He disdained altogether the mortified Montara. He looked down at the bared white head, the knife-sharp white beard, and the lean and haughty face of the aged sergeant.

It was, then, as if he looked down upon a singular edition of himself. Don Jaime was a grandee by birth and breeding, and these things amount in Spain; but the old sergeant was no less grand with adamantine adhesion to principle, with eagle-sternness and eagle-haughtiness. They eyed each other with mutual recognition and respect. They were both of the same old Spanish imperial school, unforgiving of injury, inexorable to avenge.

Said the doctor, "Peace be to you, mi sargento."

"And to you peace, Don Jaime of my soul."

"But what is this scheme I hear you hatching?"

"It is a way we have of keeping the peace of Spain."

"Cannot you drag down the Wolf-Cub without the aid of this blood-hound, Ferou?"

"We of the Guardia Civil are not podencos that can drag down the Wolf in the open. Senor Don Dios! we have tried and each time failed!"

"But the man Ferou is a human leech! Oh, I overheard your secret talk. I tell you, the Frenchman sucks life-blood for money!"

"It is thief catch thief, Don Jaime. The Wolf-

Cub, Quesada, is a cancer in the side of Spain. And Spain must be healed. We will loose the leech to suck this evil cancer from the side of Spain!"

"You are hatching a snake's egg, mi gran caballero. The fruit of it shall stink in the nostrils of all brave Moors! You may take your oath on that, Don Esteban! I for one will be no party to it!"

"No lo quiera Dios! God forbid, proud Torreblanca y Moncada, that we of the police should expect your aid! You have a higher call. Up in Minas de la Sierra, there is wailing and much sickness—ah, so many men have slapped under and died, and so many more suffer in earthly purgatory!"

"Sea como Dios quiera!" muttered Don Jaime. "God's will be done!"

The sergeant looked up at him, old eyes alive with strange fervor.

"They say of you, Don Jaime—si, and of me, too!—that we have granite boulders for hearts. But I know. Arrogante Torreblanca y Moncada is very tender with the sick. He has hands of gold for calling one back to life and for closing softly the lids of the dying. Vaya, mi gran hidalgo doctor! Go thou in the companionship of the sublime Christ and Mary, the All Compassionate!"

He stepped to one side. Don Jaime bade him a courteous adieu. Then, with all the hauteur of one riding an Arabian barb, sitting rigid in the saddle, the senor doctor loped his rawboned old nag up the winding goat path toward the barrio.

The policeman looked after him. Pascual Mon-

tara chewed fiercely the ends of his black mustache. He muttered:

"To-morrow at noon. When that great rock is hot with midday glare, this hombre Jacques Ferou will force the Sacrilegious One out upon the brink."

"Carajo, yes!" grimly agreed the old sergeant. "And we of the Guardia Civil will shoot him from below!"

CHAPTER XXXI

A MAN wasted from disease sat, all this while, in the morning sunlight on a chair tilted back against one whitewashed wall of the village chapel. His young haggard face was screwed up, and he frowned through Moorish amber eyes toward where, some distance below, the Frenchman sprawled on the great rock at the brink of the village. He could not account for the unseemly posture and gesticulating hands and head of the Frenchman.

No word of Ferou's bartering reached him. He lacked even one clue to the strange and absorbing business going forward. He did not know that the waiting members of the Guardia Civil had advanced up the gorge and now, out of sight, down at the foot of the goat path, were making cold-blooded arrangement with the Frenchman for the delivery of his own living body!

Quesada lacked the strength which would urge him boldly to investigate. And he was too weak to concentrate his mind, for any length of time, on an apparently unsolvable problem. He shrugged aside his perplexity, after a little, and sunk back into that trick of strategic plotting so natural to the feeble in body but strong in spirit.

Twisting his head about, he looked through the doorway into the hospital. Within, in that fetid moaning place where lay the sick Morales, there were no attending serranos; they had finished their

rounds for the nonce. Below on the great rock, the engrossing and unaccountable business had every appearance of engaging Ferou for some time. The way was clear.

Quesada thumped down his tilted chair and walked on weakly rickety legs to where, near the cork-oak tree in the center of the uneven street, a number of the villagers were brewing a puchero in a great iron pot.

"Come, mis paisanos!" he said in a voice surprisingly commanding for one so enervated from disease. "Ladle out to me a bowl of the stew."

"We have no orders to refuse you, Don Jacinto," answered one of the men obsequiously. "We only mind that Morales and the Americano should get none."

The bandolero snorted, but held his peace. He took the steaming earthen bowl proffered him; then quaking like one palsied, exerting a deal of effort so as not to spill a drop of the precious haricot, he slowly retraced his steps toward the sick bay.

Here he glanced back over one shoulder. The serranos had returned to the business of stirring the puchero; they were not watching him. In he staggered, through the chapel doorway, to share the soup of the stew with the sick matador, Manuel Morales.

Minutes clicked by—a good ten minutes.

Within the cabana where Carson convalesced, Felicidad was sitting in a chair at the American's bedside, her golden head nodding with drowsiness, when the *blut* of approaching feet on the earthen

floor startled her into alertness. She saw the slim gray-suited form of the Frenchman darkening the doorway. Her blue eyes widened and filled with apprehension and deep abhorrence. She shuddered involuntarily and shrunk back in the chair.

But Ferou only bowed in mock respect.

"Senor Carson," he addressed the American, "my serranos are stewing, out in the street, a fine savory ragout of meat and lentils. Would you care for some of the soup? It would be very strength-giving."

Carson, his angular hollow-cheeked face white as the pillow pressed about it, made no answering movement of head or mouth. With eyes deep-sunken and chilly blue as high mountain lakes, he looked up at the Frenchman unblinkingly.

"It will be very simple, monsenor," continued Ferou suavely, the hard lines deepening about his mouth in a grim smile. "All you have to do is to give me one of your five-thousand peseta bills! Since yesterday, the price of lentils and meat has soared on these mountains. But to you who are so rich, that is no importa. Only five thousand pesetas for a bowl of soup!"

All at once, like an unexpectedly loosed avalanche, the girl was on her feet, her blue eyes coldly ablaze like points of steel.

"You—you thief! You know he has left only one bill of five thousand pesetas! You have taken all the others! Oh, you rapacious hawk, you vile, vile vulture!" she cried out, shuddering with horrid remembrance and a sudden increase of detestation. "You would rob him of his all, everything!

You would have him end his days in want and misery, just like the pobre padre of me!"

The Frenchman did not wither beneath her scorn. He shoved his sharp blond head nearer her. And his face livid with stirred-up bile, his slate-colored eyes narrowed to mere blazing slits, he bared his long white teeth in a passionate carnivorous snarl of envenomed hate.

"You baggage, you treacherous snake! I'll show you what! When I get done my work in this barrio, you'll go with me. Mon Dieu, I'll show you how an Apache Parisien treats one such as you!"

The movement was unexpected. Sudden as the sweep of a hawk, he bent his tall athletic body forward sharply and made a grab at her wrist!

She recoiled from him. The nostrils of his high predatory nose twitching and working, his whole ashy face working and grimacing with fury like a horrible mask of rubber, he leaped after her. She sidled along the edge of the bed. Trembling in every limb like a terrorized doe, she retreated out the doorway.

Bent sharply forward, bounding from spot to spot like a leopard, the Frenchman followed.

The American attempted to lift his head from the pillow. He fell back like a load of lead. He worked his hands together and groaned aloud at his helplessness.

Came a sudden clatter of horse's hoofs out in the village; then the loud shaking voice of a man:

"Alto! Halt, you nameless wench! You have soiled my honor, profaned my name, defiled my blood! Heart of God, you must die!"

It was not the voice of the Frenchman. It was the voice of Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada. The terrible doctor had come!

Sitting stark upright upon his horse on the great rock at the brink of the village, his narrow face a cinder-gray, Don Jaime was leveling his huge horse-pistol at the backing form of the golden-haired girl!

"Ha!" exclaimed the Frenchman, his eyes lighting up like sunlight on ice, his grimacing face wreathing into an outrageous smile. "It is the haughty hidalgo come to wipe out his dishonor in the blood of ma cherie Felicidad!"

With a laugh that was worse than brutal, that was pitiless and fiendish at such a time, he sprung back into the dark shelter of the doorway.

The frail slip of a girl was left, unaided and alone, to face the avenger.

CHAPTER XXXII

ATTRACTED by the vibrant loud outcry of the terrible doctor, Jacinto Quesada put down the earthen bowl of stew, left the bedside of the sick Morales, and showed himself in the doorway of the hospital. With weakness his rickety legs tottered under him; with weakness the world reeled and swam before his eyes. He shaded his eyes with a pale and unsteady hand and peered out into the cold sunlight.

He understood thereat. Down at the end of the uneven street, on the great rock at the brink of the village, bulked Calamity on horseback!

Quesada clutched at the jamb of the door. Shaking like a tag of paper in an ugly wind, for an intolerable moment he clung there. Then all at once, in a blind broken-legged stagger, out into the street he lurched.

With every leaden stride, he seemed to gather to his need what scattered rags and tatters of strength he yet possessed. His legs straightened under him somewhat; his heavy toppling shoulders came up.

On the sudden, he slewed completely round. Back the way he had come, back toward the sick bay, he pitched.

But again and all on a sudden, he halted. He threw his arms aloft, he lifted drawn face to the cold gray sky. Hoarsely he cried out:

"Give me strength! Senor Don Dios, give me strength to do that which I now must do!"

On he sped back toward the hospital. And his feet pounded down and up, down and up without infirmity, without numb and leaden shuffle. Gone were the staggering lurch, the sagging shoulders, the rolling giddying head. Gone utterly all the various stigmata of disease-engendered weakness!

He was like a man who, suddenly overwhelmed by an ocean of water, casts off his clogging garments and strikes out nimbly and heartily. He was altogether a new man, agile to move, galvanically energized. He was mighty with an unwonted strength.

It was not a body strength. It was a strength above body strength, a strength beyond body strength. It was that strength secreted deep down but seldom drawn upon, that strength which lifts some men up and steels them to their endeavors in moments of prodigious stress. It was that epic strength which makes of weaklings, cold-eyed and high-handed heroes!

Something must be done to thwart the granite will of the implacable Don Jaime. There was need for a man. There was no time to lose.

Quick as an ape, Quesada bounded through the hospital doorway. Down the runway between the platforms and the dying men, he dashed. At the end of the smelly place, near the dingy altar, he halted. There, on the slant of the pine slabs, lay the disease-wasted form of little Gabriel, the mountain boy.

He bent over the pitifully sick child. Carefully,

round and round the puny little body, he swathed the tossed and crumpled blanket. Then up in his two arms he lifted the blanketed boy and bore him back along the runway, out the hospital door.

The child rested his head like an infant in Quesada's neck; he raised to the gaunt face of the bandolero, two dull and feebly wondering eyes. A great pity smote Quesada. Convulsively his arms tightened about the boy. He felt suddenly weak, almost unmanned. For the moment he could not continue on.

He put his mouth close to the cradled head of the boy.

"Ah, forgive me, nino of my soul!" he whispered fervently. "I do not desire to be brutal. I desire only to save our good Felicidad from cruel death at her father's hands."

Gabriel smuggled his arm about the bandolero's neck. It was a mute but trustful answer. Quesada looked over one shoulder to call back through the doorway:

"Alfonso Robledo! You can walk. Lend a hand here, man! Follow me!"

Then down the long uneven street he ran, the blanketed form of Gabriel borne before him in his tight but tender arms.

Everything was happening with breathless velocity, in a rush, in hardly an appreciable flicker of time.

As Quesada went by, from deep in the shadowy doorways of their cabanas, the mountaineers of Minas de la Sierra peered forth at him. They were like so many beady-eyed lizards in so many dark

crevices. At the first rustle of danger they had hid themselves.

No sound came from the huts. But once Quesada had put them behind two by two, there breathed up, from each cabana, an aghast whisper:

"Ah, God in Heaven! There goes Jacinto Quesada, and our own little Gabriel in the two brave arms of him! And Alfonso—Alfonso Robledo tottering after! What would they? Turn the hidalgo doctor from his terrible purpose? Ave Maria Purissima!"

Where trivial anxieties talk and gesticulate, there great anxieties stand dumb and make no sign.

Thus with the two principals in the on-sweeping tragedy. Mute and motionless as boulders of basalt, they stood transfixed against that steely background of cold sky and glacial desolate mountains—the one bulking high on horseback like some black-browed Destroying Angel, the other petrified below him in the street, a pale flower of a girl.

They did not hear the whispers from the cabanas, those whispers that were like the murmurings which come with the inchoation of a great storm or an earthquake. They did not see Quesada swinging fast down the street, the blanketed form of Gabriel in his arms and the sick bullfighter, swathed Indian-like in another blanket, lurching and tottering behind him. They had ears and eyes only for the grim and calamitous business at hand.

Poor Felicidad! For a long unendurable interval, stupefied by the shock of the hidalgo's sudden coming, she stood terrorized and iced with dismay. Then the appalling desperation of her ex-

tremity struck home to her. A violent tremor shook through her ivory and gold form, her strength ebbed away, her knees gave under her, and she began to fall.

But no! Out of her memory leaped like scalding vitriol the words with which Don Jaime had greeted her.

"Halt, you nameless wench!"

And, from deep in her being, rushed forth to hearten and uphold her a new, surprising reserve of strength and courage. With an unconscious but fine little movement of hauteur, she drew herself erect.

He had called her a nameless wench. Well, she would show this harsh hidalgo there was blood and pride in her yet. She would show him she knew how to die bravely, proudly—aye, in a manner wholly befitting a Torreblanca y Moncada!

The golden head, that was so rare in one Castilian, lifted up. Up she gazed at the avenger out of fearless and scornful blue eyes.

For a vehement moment, an emphatic quivering trice, over the long glittering barrel of the horse-pistol, Don Jaime answered her gaze.

Za, he knew the jade! She had soiled his honor, profaned his name, defiled his blood! She had run off with a creature who had no more decency than to rob the father of all his money, while he stole from him also his only child! Name of God! how he despised her!

Like was he, then, to that morose and vindictive Jehovah of the ancient Jews. His hand tightened on the heavy butt. There was, in the cold stillness,

the sharp click of an old-fashioned pistol being cocked!

Harshly the sound cracked against the ears of Jacinto Quesada. His running body lurched forward in a desperate spurt. He stumbled against the startled nag. He held up in his arms to the doctor the blanketed form of Gabriel. And hoarsely he cried out:

"God forbid, Don Jaime! Wait—for the love of Our Lady of Pity, wait! You are a physician, and we are sick here. We are sick with the dread cholera, sick unto death. Your first duty is to us. You must help us. We need you, urgently, woefully—"

Again everything was happening with breathless velocity, in a rush, in hardly an appreciable flicker of time. Quesada's voice rose almost to a scream:

"Turn your eyes upon this dying boy, Torreblanca y Moncada! Look at the glassy eyes, the deep eye pits! Look at the cheek bones bursting through the paper-dry skin! Have pity on him, Don Jaime. Eleven years old, innocent as a babe at the breast, and yet wrinkled and wan and all crumpled in a heap like a disease-riddled old man!

"Ah, Blood of Christ, Don Jaime, you are no Barbary savage to turn away from the outreaching hands of a dying child! You are a priest of the body, a servant of mankind! Your first duty is to this mortally sick child, to all the mortally sick in this village. After that, if you must, you may kill!"

Quesada trembled violently with the ardor and hunger of his entreaty. The dark-eyed, pasty-faced Gabriel shook in his uplifted arms like a

poor played-out doll of rags. An end of the blanket slipped from about the boy's shoulder, dragged free from him, fell in a heap upon the rock. Aloft to the doctor, Quesada held the little fellow stark naked in the full light of day!

Quesada fell to his knees, clawed frantically for the blanket. The child lifted slow deep-sunken eyes to the stony eyes of the grandee, as if dimly wondering what it was all about.

Quesada raised one end of the blanket to enwrap the boy, then suddenly hesitated. He had appealed to the honor of the physician. Well he knew how dear was that professional honor to Don Jaime!

Don Jaime was the sort of physician who looks upon his business of serving the ailing as a sacred commission from on high. He was like one who had taken Holy Orders with his doctor's degree. No Jesuit was more slave to his oaths; no Jesuit worked with more zeal for God and the Society than did Don Jaime for Humanity and Science.

Quesada thought, now, to essay farther. With the little fellow standing upon his own reedlike legs and clinging desperately to him, the bandolero lifted his gaunt face to the granite face of the hidalgo. In a low patient voice, he said:

"Would you let this poor child endure all the agonies of purgatory and wretchedly die, while you carry out your cruel scheme of vengeance? Look at him, Don Jaime! Give heed to the legs that are like walking-sticks, the poor thin wrists, the bony little neck, the body limp as a soaking dish towel!

"Have pity on him, Don Jaime—you who know

what it is to suffer! The Senor Don Dios has been far more cruel to him than ever He has been to you! Not a month gone, He took the child's widowed mother from him; she was one of the first to be claimed by the plague. Now the poor baby is all alone in the world!"

Quesada swathed the boy in the blanket. Cradling him tenderly in his arms, he got quietly to his feet. He waited.

Don Jaime hesitated. The horse-pistol shook violently in his hand. His agate eyes softened.

Then, all at once, an appalling change swept over Don Jaime. Deep in the crypts and catacombs of his brain, old rankling memories stirred—old painful and dolorous memories got up, and walked about, and paraded back and forth in somber procession. He could have screamed, so tortured was he that moment!

Why should he, the grievously outraged one, show pity? Why should he turn aside from his scheme of vengeance to succor this dying child, these wretched people? Once before had he been robbed when he sought revenge for a mortal wrong. This jade's mother had run off with a gypsy picador. And though the hand of God had intervened in that elopement as a sublime instrument of vengeance, always had he regretted, through the dreary and bitter years, that his own hand had not slain the mother of Felicidad.

Not another time would he suffer himself to be turned aside. He was like that awful Jehovah of the Jews! He would be revenged up to the hilt, paid back in full!

He tore his eyes from the piteous face of the boy Gabriel. He freshened his grip on the horse-pistol, lifted it up. Slowly over the level of it he eyed the waiting girl.

Rose suddenly a shout from Quesada:

"Take the boy away, Alfonso Robledo! He is only a peasant's sniveling cub, a mountaineer's orphan brat! What cares the grandee of Spain for our little Gabriel? Take him away; the hidalgo Don Jaime will have none of him! Let him die!"

Robledo tottered forward. He took the blanketed child in his arms. Turning about, slowly back toward the hospital he made.

Quesada lifted his haggard face. With a contempt biting and goading in its virulence, he cried:

"Proceed, proud Torreblanca y Moncada! You have your high knightly honor to defend, your name and blood to purge! Shoot!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

Now it may have been because of the miraculous interposition of the Espiritu Santo, or it may have been by reason of the sudden and brutal exposure; but all at once, as he was borne away in the arms of Robledo, the boy Gabriel took an abrupt turn for the worse—a cruel cramping fit seized him in its formidable vise!

Violent spasms shook and threw him about like a tossed beanbag; his teeth clenched together with the paralysis of lockjaw; his legs and arms knotted up and flung out again as if they would tear themselves apart from his body. All in a trice, and ere Robledo could prevent, he writhed out of the bull-fighter's grasp and fell rolling and squirming upon the ground, his fingers clawing at the yellow earth.

Blind to everything else, screaming his fear and horror, Quesada leaped toward him. But some one bulked before the bandolero, blocked his way, dashed head-bent for the boy's side.

That some one held in his hand an instrument of gleaming silver, needle-sharp at one end. He dropped to his knees beside the pitifully contorted Gabriel. He shoved the needle point into the boy's knotted arm above the wrist; gave it a quick jab. That some one was the hidalgo doctor, Don Jaime!

Once the hypodermic injection acted on the spinal cord and the medulla oblongata, the spasms would

be checked, quieted, allayed. But there must be a circulation of blood. Too slow, altogether too slow, was the blood trickling through the lad's veins. He was sinking fast.

With swift harsh hands, Don Jaime rubbed desperately the boy's arms, legs and spine. But Gabriel's pulse was dying; rapidly his skin was turning to a blue tinge; like dew chilling to frost, the surface of his body was freezing icily. The injection of morphia failed to impact on the nerve centers. It was without effect.

On a sudden the little fellow kicked out, then lay rigid as one who stiffens in the petrifying clutch of death. All the breath had fled his nostrils. He was in the asphyxial stage of the cholera.

Don Jaime, kneeling beside the collapsed form, tore with his harsh hands at jaw and brow to force open the vised mouth. Between the boy's clenching teeth, he wedged the blunt end of the silver syringe. Then he strove to force air into the sunken empty lungs. He strove brusquely yet carefully, as one strives over a drowning man. He lifted the reedlike arms above the boy's head, then back to his sides and up again.

He worked feverishly, he worked heroically. He reached for the black leather box he had thrown behind him. The broken straps on that box showed where it had been torn with sudden violence from the cantle of his saddle.

Quesada hastened to aid his groping hand. He picked up the box and held it open.

"Ammonia!" snapped the doctor. "Hold it to his nose!"

Quesada withdrew from the box a labeled blue bottle. As Don Jaime worked the puny arms up and down with a certain circumspect precision, Quesada held the pungent salts beneath the slightly fluttering nostrils.

"Build a fire! Heat water!" Don Jaime exploded, never ceasing his labors. "Quick! We must give the boy a hot bath to circulate the blood and save him from dying!"

"We have a fire going night and day," returned Quesada. "We have only to remove the heated stones to the bathing pool."

"Where is it, this pool? Lead the way!"

The haughty doctor leaped afoot. He had no thought but for the urgent business at hand. He was a thrall to grim and importunate necessity. Even as his personal honor was to him more precious than life, so was his physician's honor a covenant with Jehovah, tyrannical and imperious to command him.

Quesada, flinging his rickety legs wide apart, went swaying and floundering up the uneven street. Don Jaime followed after the bandolero, the little Gabriel in his own hidalgo arms.

The heat of the bath circulated the lad's blood. By slow degrees, he drew out of the chill collapse. Don Jaime wrapped him snug in a blanket. Once again, in his own hidalgo arms, the grandee doctor carried the boy back to the sick bay.

As he entered that fetid moaning place, a kind of shiver trembled through Don Jaime. He made along the runway between the platforms of tossing, groaning, and emaciated sick, his gray eyes

darting from side to side. At the upper end of the chapel, near the dingy altar, he laid the boy down.

What of the hot bath and resultant circulation of blood, the injection of morphia was now at last achieving its purpose. No sooner had the poor lad touched the pine slabs than he passed blissfully into the dwelling place of sleep.

Don Jaime looked down the two platforms of blanketed sick. Slowly and gloomily he shook his white head. He turned to Quesada following dog-like after him. His narrow face was a cinder-gray.

"You have spoken aright, son of a mangy she-wolf," he said. "I came nigh to forgetting my duty. I am a priest of the body. My first duty is to the suffering and dying here! After that—"

He paused ominously. He looked about as if in search of something. Of a sudden his roving eyes became focused, riveted; they flashed like cressets of fire. Through the hospital doorway, out into the cold sunlight he gazed.

He saw Felicidad down the village street. From the spell of terror and despair she was only then recovering. She glanced quickly about her. It was as if she had been away on a long journey and was astounded now to find everything as it had been before. She shuddered visibly like one starting to life who had been dead for intolerable moments.

Lip quivering but head held with a quiet proud demeanor, she turned toward the cabana wherein the American lay. As she entered the low doorway

Jacques Ferou, lurking in the dark, sidled past her and out.

The Frenchman's whole malignant soul was bunched and crouched in his eyes. He threw after the golden form of the girl a look searing and blasting. It was as if, now that the vengeance of the hidalgo had failed him, he would kill the girl himself with that one glare from his slaty eyes.

Don Jaime's lips clicked together. Looking piercingly through the doorway, his agate eyes lunged like sharp knives at the venomous Frenchman and the white trembling girl. In a voice chill as a glacial wind, he spoke.

"After I have fulfilled here my duty to the sick," he said—"after that, by the Life, I slay!"

He would say no more. His lips tightened into a line thin and grim as if chiseled in stone.

He went down and up the line of platforms, dosing each sufferer in turn. To some he gave stimulants and astringents; to those in the more severe stages of the disease, he doled out opiates.

He went from cabana to choza outside, bringing brandy and nutritive food to the convalescing. He was leaving the choza of one villager when Quesada, dogging his steps, plucked him by the sleeve.

"You have seen, señor don hidalgo?" asked the bandolero. "The Frenchman Ferou is up here, also."

"I know," nodded Don Jaime austerely. "He is wherever trouble is. He is the scum that gathers where things are filthy, an abomination to be squashed under the heel! Za!" he ended, with profound loathing. "He is a human leech!"

Quickly then, as they approached the next cabana, he related with characteristic frankness and bitter contempt, all he had seen and heard that morning in the gorge at the foot of the goat path.

Quesada showed little surprise. What could one expect from the French vulture!

But what did surprise him not a little was to find, upon putting his hand inside his sheepskin zamarra, that the small mahogany-colored leather purse of the doctor was no longer there. Carajo! what had become of the purse and money of Don Jaime?

"It is that Frenchman!" he quickly surmised. "Don Jaime, he has stolen your money for a second time! I took the purse from him in that affair of the Seville-to-Madrid; I was holding all those five thousand peseta bills for you, my senor doctor; but while I was down sick and knew nothing, the French ferret must have gone through my pockets!"

Don Jaime only grunted.

They entered the obscurity of the next cabana. Within, Felicidad was sitting at the bedside of the convalescing American, explaining all that had occurred. At their appearance, she abruptly quieted.

Pointing to the American upon the leaf-stuffed couch, Quesada explained in a few sketchy sentences just who Carson was and all he had done. Then the bandolero told how Ferou had charged Carson for the medicines so vital to his recovery and even for the bare necessities of life.

"The Frenchman is a plunderer, an extortioner, Don Jaime. He charged prices, exorbitant prices. He robbed this man of all his ready money. Senor Don Dios, it was outrageous, detestable! There

was no need of prices; the man was down on his back, helpless, well-nigh dead; there was no need of prices of any kind. But what could we do? In all the barrio, Ferou was the only one armed."

The hidalgo doctor lifted Carson's heavy hand to feel his pulse. He said no word. He never once looked toward Felicidad who had arisen to her feet and stepped to one side.

Yet Quesada knew. In this expose of Ferou's execrable character, it was plain by comparison that the Frenchman had artfully cajoled Felicidad and then used her as a cat's-paw to pluck golden chestnuts out of the fire. The girl had been duped and ensnared by the creature's wiles. Even to the adamantine mind of the senor doctor, the blow and blot of his daughter's conduct must inevitably pall before the odiousness of the Frenchman's villainy.

But again Don Jaime said no word. He only prescribed a certain diet for Carson. Without so much as a softening glance toward the pale and fearful girl, he marched out of the cabana, his boots clamping down in firm measured strides.

They returned to the hospital only to find Gabriel suffering, once more, in the grip of the plague. To ease the poor lad's griping pangs and still the heart-tearing cries for his dead mother, the senor doctor dropped a few beads of chloroform down his throat.

"Do not despair, my precious little man!" encouraged Morales, in a husky voice, from his place down the platform. "Have a high fearless heart, and the great Torreblanca will yet pull you through."

With an utterness of gratitude at having won

such inspiriting words from the matador whom he so venerated, the boy thanked Morales with black eyes that were smoldering great coals in their deep pits.

Don Jaime turned to Quesada. Morales had tossed off the upper end of his blanket and the hidalgo had suddenly noticed the gold-braided green jacket about the matador's torso. With that characteristic frankness of his which so often sounded brutal and coarse, he queried:

"Who is this hombre in gold-tinsel and green that has such faith in the ability and concoctions of Torreblanca y Moncada?"

"Que, que!" exclaimed the bandolero, distinctly surprised. "What, what! Does not the senor doctor know?"

But the doctor did not even remember having seen the man in the excitement of his first rounds.

"That is Morales, the bravest espada in all the Spains!"

"Morales? Manuel Morales, that great murderer of bulls, that supremely dexterous one with the sword? And here!"

Don Jaime went at once to the side of the wanly smiling matador.

"My Manuel Morales," he said with earnestness, "all Spain mourns for its lost pastime while you lie helpless here. We must quickly get you well. But valgame Dios! no poor few remedies of mine will work the miracle half so speedily as that own brave golden Moorish heart of you!"

Interposed Quesada quietly:

"Jacques Ferou robbed our Manuel, too. And

you know the great Morales, Don Jaime! He would rather starve than play the mouse to this hawk. Yet he had to pay!

"Ah, Torreblanca y Moncada," he added with rising vehemence, "this hombre Ferou, is a human bloodsucker, as you say! He is a greedy, foul buzzard!"

Don Jaime snapped erect. A portentous gleam was in his stony eyes.

"He robbed Manuel Morales, too!" he exclaimed. "That's enough; not another word! We will give the creature short shrift! Carajo! I have a plan."

Quesada and Morales looked about to see that no henchman of Ferou had chanced to overhear. The doctor understood their wary glances. He lowered his voice.

"All the short jump up the goat path," he said in even tones, "ever since this morning when I heard the French ringworm's conversation in the gorge, I have been formulating this plan. And it is a good plan; it will attain many ends at the one time. It will blight the treacherous plot of Ferou, save you from the Guardia Civil, Quesada, and in the same breath win back for me my stolen money! Ah, it is almost divine in its justice! Mediante Dios—God willing, I will use it as another instrument of my vengeance!"

Quesada gasped.

"You mean to kill the French leech? But my senor doctor, in the whole pueblo, Jacques Ferou is the only man armed! No lo quiera Dios, Don Jaime! God forbid, yet I fear he will slay you first!"

"I have a horse-pistol," said the physician with grave significance. "Yet I do not mean to sully these hidalgo hands of mine by killing him myself. Seguramente, no! He shall die, but from no bullet of mine!"

He shook his white head slowly as if fixing something definite in his mind.

"To-morrow noon," he added imperiously. "To-morrow noon, he shall die!"

It was the selfsame hour Ferou himself had bargained with the Guardias Civiles for the killing of Quesada!

Don Jaime would say no more. He was as arrogantly enigmatic as the very God Himself!

CHAPTER XXXIV

Don Jaime worked that day. That night he slaved. About eventide Alfonso Robledo, the banderillero who so bravely had seconded Quesada that morning, suffered all at once a severe relapse. Perhaps it came from the overheating excitement of that crucial time upon the rock; perhaps the abrupt exposure in that intrepid try to avert Felicidad's cruel and barbarous fate, had brought it on; at any rate and all on a sudden, his weakened body began writhing in an agony of cramps.

There was nothing else for it. The hidalgo doctor gave the bullfighter a hypodermic injection of morphia. The paroxysms lessened, altogether ceased. The eyelids of the banderillero rolled down heavily, and he slumped into a deep stertorous sleep.

That reawakened in Don Jaime the Fear. He made once more a round of the hospital. He went from choza to cabana outside, seeking new cases. Where a man could not sleep or a woman persisted in moaning, he administered narcotics.

When morning dawned through wisps of rain, the long night of taxing and intolerable work showed plainly in the doctor. His narrow face looked thin and long as a ferule; the cheek bones were high, the aquiline nose never more imperious. What with all the coffee he had drunk like a good Moor, to accelerate the action of his brain and steady the

movement of his hand, his skin seemed tinged to a deeper swarth.

Quesada awoke early and with a renewed strength. He brewed for the grandee another pot of fresh aromatic coffee.

Don Jaime had gone down behind the cabanas to release his hobbled old skate of a horse and lead him to water. When he returned, his huge horse-pistol was strapped to his waist.

He quaffed two cups of the coffee in quick succession. He stained, with marked and aloof indifference, his usually immaculate white point of a beard. Then, without a word, with feruled face determined and grim, he returned into the hospital to his urgent ministry.

It was coming noon. Quesada was sunning himself before the hospital, according to his daily wont, when Ferou appeared around one mud wall with the suddenness of a jack-in-the-box.

In his right hand the Frenchman showed a revolver. He pointed the revolver at Quesada. With a politeness that seemed more deadly than the gleam of the gun, he said:

"You will arise, Senor Don Jacinto. You will do all that which I tell you to do. Aupa!"

The chair, tilted against the mud wall, banged down upon its forlegs. Quesada got to his feet.

"March forward past me. Now stop. It is good, my brave bandolero. Now, with me behind you, march toward that great rock on the brink of the pueblo!"

Everything was happening as the doctor had foretold. The tall Frenchman nudged Quesada with

the muzzle of the revolver in the small of his back. They started on. And then, all at once, from the gloom of the chapel behind them, came the galvanic voice of the hidalgo:

"Alto! Drop that gun, you French leech!"

Quesada did not dare turn round. But Ferou, his blond lids fluttering with stupendous surprise, gave a quick glance back over his shoulder. He saw the hidalgo doctor standing in the low doorway, the huge horse-pistol leveled in one harsh fist, his eyes gleaming like quartz in the sun.

The Frenchman gave a precipitant leap to one side. He was quick as an ape. He slewed round, his revolver lifted.

An explosion burst from the pistol of the doctor. Ferou's revolver dropped to the mud. He clutched his right wrist. It was trickling blood from where a bullet had creased the flesh like a branding wire.

"Quesada!" cracked the thin lips of Don Jaime. "Pick up that revolver. You, Ferou, march in here!" He menaced the Frenchman with that huge gun which was loaded and ready for more quick work.

Quesada turned round, thereat, and lifted from the mud the Frenchman's revolver. He shook off the clinging silt and pointed it at Ferou. His ashy face working like a monkey's with abrupt and nervous apprehension, the Frenchman marched into the hospital.

Once inside, in the runway between the blanketed figures of plague sufferers, Don Jaime snapped out a terse and inexplicable command. Ferou thought

himself the only one that understood its purpose. A shuddering fit seized him. He knew that, in the receptacles beneath his armpits, were concealed the small mahogany-colored leather purse he had taken from Quesada and the peseta bills he had pitilessly mulcted out of Carson and Morales. He thought that the doctor was searching for them.

"Undress!" repeated the hidalgo.

The Frenchman's slate-colored eyes fluttered about. He saw Quesada threatening him with his own revolver. There was no help for it. With fingers suddenly thick and clumsy with nervousness, he began to unbutton his gray tweeds.

"And you, too, Quesada!" ended the doctor. "Give the Frenchman's revolver into the keeping of Morales, and undress, too!"

Quesada did not at all understand. He saw Morales sitting up, as if prepared to lend aid, a pillow bolstering his back. He passed the Frenchman's revolver into the hands of the matador. Then bewildered but blindly obedient, he began to doff his alpagartas, rough corduroys, and sheepskin zamarra.

The Frenchman stood forth in his nether garments, a tall, quaking and almost ludicrous figure. He watched Quesada, a nameless fear sharpening his slate-colored eyes.

"Hand over the money, Senor Ferou," said Don Jaime with frosty politeness; then explosively: "All of it! Pronto!"

The eyes of the Frenchman flashed like the eyes of a ferocious animal about to be robbed of its meat. But quickly he got himself in hand; the bale-

ful gleam dulled. He shot a questioning glance toward the disrobing bandolero. Perhaps this thing he sensed and dreaded was only a grisly figment of his imagination. Perhaps, after all, the doctor only wanted the money. It were wise to obey.

With an astonishing readiness, he produced, from the receptacles cunningly prepared beneath his armpits, the purse of the doctor and the bills belonging to Morales and Carson.

Don Jaime did not wait to open the purse and inspect its contents. He shoved the wallet into his pocket. He cast the roll of loose bills upon the platform beside Morales.

"They belong to you and the American. You can take what is due you and return the others to Senor Carson. But hola! let the division go till later!"

He kicked the gray tweeds of Ferou over the hard-tamped earth floor toward Quesada.

"Put them on," he commanded bluntly.

The bandolero nodded, though as yet he did not comprehend the whyfore of it all. With dispatch, he commenced to garb himself in the tweeds of the Frenchman which, despite the hard usage of the last few weeks, still showed the ineradicable signs of good material.

"You, Ferou!" the doctor bit out. "You don the clothes of Quesada!"

The growing nameless fear in Ferou's brain bourgeoned, at that command, into noisome bloom. His jaw slacked and began an incontrollable quivering. His eyes glittered in a pasty sweating face.

"Mais non, mais non!" he cried, lapsing in his

extremity into his native tongue. "Not that, monsieur! You cannot demand that! The clothes, they are dirty, foul!"

It was only the subterfuge of a time of dire peril. His eyes darted wildly about. They sought Morales. Morales had been very tender with the sick. Perhaps—

But Morales was leveling his own revolver at him with a hand only a trifle less steady than that of the doctor. His face, parchment-dry and sunken of flesh from the ravages of disease, was forbidding with grim determination.

"Put them on!" persisted Don Jaime.

Solemnly then and very laboriously, with jaw still quivering and shaking hands, Ferou dressed in the sheepskin zamarra, rough corduroys, and alpagartas of the bandolero. Don Jaime himself clapped upon Ferou's blond head the high-pointed hat of Quesada.

"Now, march!" he exploded. "March toward that great rock on the brink of the village!"

All the Frenchman's dismal fears became quick and instant. He was sure now! The nostrils of his predatory nose twitching and working, his whole pasty face working and grimacing, with unrestrainable fear, like a horrible mask of rubber, he groveled on his knees and held out his two arms to the doctor in abject supplication.

"Mercy, Don Jaime! Mon Dieu, you would not have me shot like a dog!"

"March!" the hidalgo insisted. His voice rang with metallic timbre; his gray eyes flashed as if they were bits of flint upon which steel had struck.

He shoved the muzzle of his pistol against the Frenchman's chest.

Ferou stumbled to his feet and backed out the doorway. The doctor followed him step by step. Quesada, a great light coruscating in his brain, recovered the revolver from the bedridden Morales and bounded out in the wake of the two.

Thus, the Frenchman retreating before the importunate muzzle of the senor doctor's pistol, Quesada following after, they went down the muddy street toward that great rock which glared, in the noontide sunlight, on the brink of the village.

Once the Frenchman paused. Imploringly, he lifted his still bleeding right hand.

"Monsenor!" he cried. "For the love of Christ, monsenor—"

Came the sharp click of a pistol being cocked. Then, like a sharper echo of it, the command of the doctor.

"March!"

A mad notion to turn and run for it seized Ferou. But no! They would shoot him down ere he could take ten steps. They were too close.

The police, on the other hand, would be far below, in the gorge. Maybe their carbines would miss. There was always hope.

He backed out upon the hot glaring rock.

Came a yell from the hidalgo, sounding shrill and bodiless in the thin air, and carrying back and far away in ringing echoes:

"Hola, mis Guardias Civiles! Jacinto Quesada—he is here!"

An answering shout spiraled up from the deeps

of the gorge. Then, on the heels of it, one long slithering shaft of sound. The crang of a carbine!

Ferou threw up his arms and, his face black with congested blood, half spilled forward as if he had been struck by a blow between the shoulders. He swayed back and forth on the balls of his feet, caught himself, hung still for intolerable moments. Then, as is usually the case with a man killed by a bullet, he tottered backward, slipped on the crumbling lip of the rock and went over, clutching with white clawing hands at the brink, twisting, turning, and shrieking—shrieking for minutes afterward, shrieking hideously!

CHAPTER XXXV

DOCTOR TORREBLANCA Y MONCADA strategically overcame the trouble engendered by cremation. He had the serranos burn whole trees and from the ashes, by percolation through water, produce a leaching of lye. Then, a goodly distance from the water supply coursing through the old Moorish flume, on the lip of the gorge where a void had been left by the dismantling of the two infected cabanas, he had the men of the pueblo dig a deep pit. Therein he purposed burying the dead in sheets of the burning alkali.

On the morning following that on which poetic justice had come to Ferou, he approached Quesada, who was superintending the work of digging the pit. Save for a certain wolfish gauntness, the bandolero was almost himself.

"Jacinto," he said, "do you feel hardy enough, my haggard one, to journey down these hills to my casa near Granada?"

The Moorish oblong eyes of the bandolero showed surprise and a shade of fear.

"I am easily strong enough by now, Don Jaime. But—"

"Is it the police you fear? They rode away immediately after the killing of Ferou."

Quesada shook his head.

"I am frank with you, my hidalgo doctor. Should I absent myself from the barrio, I would

fear for Felicidad of the gold hair and heart of fire!"

With his cold gray eyes, the grandee looked at Quesada and through and through him. As if mouthing some religious dogma, he returned haughtily:

"You know, son of a mangy she-wolf, that no man can halt a Torreblanca y Moncada once he says, I will! Ea pues! It is thus with my vengeance. The ancient name of my house, the blood of my veins, must be cleared of all tainture! Felicidad must die!"

"God preserve you, Don Jaime! You are still the soul of granite, unforgiving and unsparing even though your stolen money is all returned to you now, and your daughter's disgrace altogether wiped out by the death of the French poodle!"

The hidalgo laughed harshly. He refused in his lordly pride to argue. Cleverly he countered:

"And you, Jacintito; you are still the Wolf-Cub, ever leaping to the jade's defense as you did when you were only a bantling!

"But it is not because I wish to be rid of you that I ask you to journey," he went on. "You have reminded me that I am a priest of the body. It is of my profession I speak. I need medicines. The supply is nearly exhausted."

"But I carted up such a lot, fully four canvas packs!"

"I know. But mi gran espada Manuel and the Senor Carson, both well-meaning but untutored, made extravagant inroads on the treasures you brought. And hearing from old Tio Pedro that

you had stocked yourself so well, I rode extra light to make speed."

"Yet things are going better now," objected Quesada. "There are fewer deaths and more recoveries."

"Thank God for that! But one can never tell. The present even tone of the weather may suddenly change and cause the scourge to redouble its havoc. I must not run short."

"That is true," nodded Quesada. Yet it was evident that he still hesitated to go for fear of leaving Felicidad unassisted and helpless before the cold implacable wrath of her father.

Said Don Jaime, commencing to offer inducements, plainly weakening before the obstinacy of the bandolero:

"If you will go, Jacinto, you may take my horse. No other has ridden him in over ten years. He will carry you well, though only at a snail's pace."

Quesada realized what that offer meant.

"I will take the horse," he agreed. "That horse of yours shall be as a bond given in hand to me, Don Jaime, that you will remain here and stay your vengeance until I return!"

"My vengeance? Well, like the Judgment Day of Christ, that can wait!"

"Is it a promise?"

"It is a promise!"

"Vaya, Don Jaime!"

"Con Dios, Jacintito!"

Garbed in the once elegant clothes of the dead Frenchman, even to his slouch traveling hat, Quesada sat deep in the doctor's saddle and care-

fully guided the old rawboned nag down the loops of the goat path.

He kept a wary eye out for the policemen. The Guardias Civiles might chance to be lingering on in the gorge. But the trampled space about the alder tree was wholly deserted; the ashes from the breakfast fire of the day before were being rapidly dissipated by the draughty wind.

He pushed on down. Crackling over the fallen leaves in the gorges, clattering along the stony hogbacks and ridges, he came, in the waning afternoon, to the boulder-strewn pocket of the Christ of the Pass. And suddenly from below, louder than the ring of his horse's hoofs, there echoed up to him a sharp sound like the report of a pistol.

Come of long outlawry, Quesada was circumspectly cautious. The report might have exploded near at hand; the chances were that, with the odd carrying knack of sounds high on mountains, it had echoed, clear and distinct, from far away. But he would take no chances.

The ragged prickly gorse and huge boulders, which bestrewed the pass about the foot of the cross, furnished unusual hiding places. He dismounted hastily, tied his horse behind a sumach bush and, behind a tall boulder, hid himself.

Twilight deepened quickly into full dark night. It was gruesome waiting there beneath the pale white figure of the Saviour, with its crown of black horsehair and red-painted wounds. Save for the wind sweeping through the pass with little shrill noises, nothing stirred or sounded in the long defile.

After a little, Quesada conquered his vague apprehensions sufficiently to sup upon the cold sausages, dry bread, and bota of wine which he had had the forethought to sling to the cantle of his saddle. Then it was on again, through the dark night and the savage uncouth pass, in haste to accomplish his errand for the doctor.

A piece of moon came up and shot long pale slithers of light down the rock walls. Ahead, in the sudden wan light, he made out the bent and bundled figure of an old, shawl-wrapped peasant woman. She was coming toward him up the gorge. She seemed making little catching sounds, as if softly weeping.

"A Dios, mother," he greeted, as he rode past.

She gave him neither answer nor notice. Her few wisps of white hair streaming in disarray from under her flat worsted cap, she went by, sobbing quietly, as if utterly oblivious of his presence.

Quesada looked after her bent form and shook his head commiseratingly.

"Ah, there has been some little domestic trouble in her cabana this night!" he remarked to himself. "And she is going on, the poor creature, to seek strength and consolation from the lonely Christ of the Pass. It is the way they have in these desolate hills—Hola! What's the matter, my bony Pegasus!"

The nag beneath him, suddenly shying, had come to a dead stop, and now was shivering in every limb. They had just rounded the bend which portaled the pass. Leaping afoot in the stirrups, Quesada gazed over the lifted frightened head of

the horse. Ahead in the open road and shapeless in the vague moonlight, he saw something lying still and black!

Ever wary of ambush, resultant from long outlawry, he sprung out of the saddle and getting the horse by the bridle, shoved him violently back into the shadow of the spur. For an intolerable fraction of time, he peered round the bend and watched.

The black shapeless huddle in the road never moved. Was it some animal, sleeping or dead? He crept forward cautiously, Ferou's old revolver in hand. He put out his fingers toward the vague outline of it. He touched soft cloth, he touched a yielding mass. Wounds of Christ! it was the body of a man!

His hand jerked back in superstitious fear. The man did not move; he was lying on his face. Quesada put out his hand again and touched the still thing with a braver and more prying touch. All at once he turned it over.

Stark in the moonlight showed a short knife-sharp white beard, a fine-chiseled imperious nose, and a swarthy face, lean and haughty as a griffon vulture's! The revolver fell from his palsied hand.

"Sangre de Cristo!" his dry lips fluttered. "It is Don Jaime himself!"

But no! Don Jaime could not be here. Had he not left the hidalgo doctor, that every morning, in the village above in the sierras?

A grave calmness came upon him then, and a questing thoroughness. Who was the man? Somehow his features seemed familiar. Was it

only because of that striking resemblance to Don Jaime?

He noticed, all at once, that there was visible on the body, under the powdering of dust from the road, a kind of red-edged blue jacket. On one sleeve was a single red chevron, and to one side, almost hidden in the dust, the shimmer of a patent leather hat. With a stifled gasp, recognition leaped full-fledged into his brain. The man was Senor Don Esteban Alvarado, the aged sergeant of the Guardia Civil!

No more than a few weeks before, Quesada had seen the sergeant in the gorge below Minas de la Sierra, dominant with life and lording it over the apelike policeman Montara. To find the sergeant now only a still black huddle in the road was a distinct shock to the bandolero. He knew that just the day before either the sergeant or Montara had shot Ferou.

Almost incredulous, Quesada felt the body for signs of life. But the sergeant was dead. His body was not what one could call warm, yet neither was it cold with that soft stickiness so instinctively repulsive to the living touch. The sergeant had been killed only a short time before. A caking of dust on the torso of his jacket showed where the blood had oozed from a bullet wound in the chest, and quickly dried.

"It was that shot I heard!" the bandolero surmised. "But who killed him? And why?"

Of the sudden, he remembered the old woman who had passed him in the road, crying softly to herself. He bounded back around the bend. But

in the intervening jiffy of time, the shadows of the defile had swallowed her from sight.

"She is the sergeant's poor old wife," he said to himself. "She must have come upon him, slain like a dog in the road. I knew Don Esteban, his wife, and son lived in these hills. Now the poor old woman is gone to pray before the Christ of the Pass for the eternal welfare of his departed soul. May it rest in peace!"

He came back to the black huddle, still profoundly puzzled as to whom had done the killing. He turned the body over into that posture in which he had found it. He retrieved his fallen revolver.

He was about to mount and ride on, when abruptly he halted, one foot in the stirrup. An enlightening but bitter thought had suddenly shocked his brain.

For a long time now, crimes had been committed which he never had a hand in, but which in every case had been laid at his door. Automobiles had been held up, toreros' chapels invaded, men robbed and even killed by a young man described as Jacinto Quesada when, all the time, Quesada himself had been quarantined in Minas de la Sierra.

There was a sinister purpose, a foul plan underlying the criminal's habit of masquerading and posing as Jacinto Quesada. Behind the personality of Quesada, he was cloaking his own identity and committing crimes without a suspicion pointing toward himself. What could be more probable than that this same criminal had killed the old policeman?

"It was that masquerader!" the bandolero ex-

claimed to the night. And he swore: "By the Nails of Christ!"

He circled by the prone body in the road, his horse nervous and quivering with instinctive fright. He kicked the nag into a brisk canter. He sought thus in action to quiet the thoughts which now were bothering his brain. He pursued the descent.

But the turgid thoughts would not be stifled. They fluttered in his head like the pale moonbeams on the rock walls. They filled him with gloom as profound as the shadow-haunted deeps of the narrow way.

He, Jacinto Quesada, had discovered the corpse. Was that not strange, portentous? It seemed to him now as if the hand of God were foreshadowing, in this grisly discovery, some tragic misfortune about to befall him. The masquerader had committed the crime of blood. Well, the penalty for it would strike most surely upon Quesada's head! Of that, he felt superstitiously certain!

He made the sign of the horned hand in an attempt to avert the impending evil. But no use. His mind would not still, nor would the misgivings die. He reined in the nag.

"There is but one thing for me to do," he announced to himself. "I must return to the side of the corpse, and kneel and say a prayer for his soul in purgatory. A mere word of requiescat is not enough. He was mine enemy in life; I must show complete Christian forgiveness toward him, now that he is dead. That alone will prevent a curse from falling upon me!"

He was kneeling in prayer beside the dead

sergeant and had reached the words: "May his soul, and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace," when, all at once from down the road, his ears were assailed by a startling sound—the hoofbeats of approaching horses!

Hastily he made the sign of the cross and got to his feet. Dragging his horse by the bridle after him, he concealed both nag and himself completely in the deep shadowy elbow of the spur.

Came to him then, on the vagrant breaths of the night wind, the sound of voices. They were men's voices, loud above the steady hoofbeats of the horses, as if raised in some wordy contention:

"But I tell you, Pascual Montara, the Wolf-Cub is not dead!"

"And I tell you, mi capitan, Quesada *is* dead! Right now, were you not my superior officer, I should be on my way down to Getafe to file Don Esteban's report."

"You say the sargento, Don Esteban, has returned to his home in these mountains?"

"Si; seguramente, si! His work is accomplished. After killing the Wolf-Cub, Quesada, is he not entitled to a good rest? Test the truth of my statement, el capitan; ask his son, young Miguel there, if his father does not live in these hills."

"It is most certainly true, mi Capitan Guevara," answered a new voice. "I myself was born and raised in a portilla of the Picacho de la Veleta."

"Za, this is the wild-goose chase!" exclaimed the raucous voice of Montara. "This is the wild-goose chase, I tell you—this chase after a man already

dead! Down in Getafe by now, ten thousand pesetas should be awaiting the Frenchman as a reward for having brought about the killing of Jacinto Quesada."

"And that was when, you say?"

"I have told you twenty times. It was but yesterday."

"Then answer me this, apelike one! I have asked it of you a hundred times before. How is it that the diligence from Granada to Montefrio was held up only last night and the bandolero announced that he was Jacinto Quesada himself? He fled into these hills, and we hot after him!"

The men of the Guardia Civil usually ride in pairs; but this was a troop of the Guardia Civil, an extraordinary troop. Peering around the spur, Quesada made out eleven uniformed men riding smartly toward him through the dim moonlight.

One was, of course, that apelike policeman, Pascual Montara, whom Quesada last had seen in the gorge below Minas de la Sierra with Don Esteban. It appeared, from the tenor of the conversation, that Montara had been on his way down to headquarters to file the sergeant's report of Quesada's death when he had been met on the road by the troop and turned back by the order of the captain.

Quesada well knew this captain as one Luis Guevara. Eight others he recognized as gendarmes with whom he had had an occasional brush. The eleventh was the dead man's son, Miguel Alvarado, youthful, tall, smoothly brown of face, and as subtle

and gallant-looking in the vague moonlight as a sword of Toledo.

Now, such a large body of the Guardia Civil could be seldom seen on the main-traveled highroads, let alone in the gorge-pierced sierras of the Nevada. Something untoward was afoot. But it was not the mysterious murder of the old sergeant which had called them together. Not one of the approaching policemen had discovered as yet, close to the entrance of the pass, that huddle lying still and black in the road. They did not know Don Esteban was dead.

They were riding after Jacinto Quesada, whom Montara believed he had killed, for a crime that Jacinto Quesada himself was positive he never had committed!

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE party of policemen discovered, all at once, the body in the road. Hastily, from their huddling, quivering horses, they dismounted. They turned the body over. With amazement and deep consternation, they saw that it was one of themselves, the haughty sergeant of police, Senor Don Esteban Alvarado!

Miguel, the dead man's son, stood over his father's body.

"It is that Jacinto Quesada!" he said, terribly moved. "He has come upon my poor old father alone in the road, and he has killed him without ruth. By the Wounds of Christ!" he swore, lifting his right hand to heaven—"I will seek out this murderer; I will hound him down; at last, remorselessly, I will kill him! I have taken my oath."

In the thick shadow of the bend, Jacinto Quesada smiled bitterly to himself. Just as he had forecasted, just so had matters shaped themselves. He was blamed for the crime of another!

But the captain, Luis Guevara, was speaking:

"This proves that Montara is mistaken—the Wolf-Cub is still alive! As you say, mi pobre Miguel, without ruth he has killed your father, an old, honored, and brave member of the police!

"Carajo! Only once before, in the case of that traveling Englishman, has Quesada killed a man. His conscience will be more disturbed by this

atrocity than by his usual crimes. Surely now, after this vile deed of blood, will he seek out a priest and beg forgiveness of God!

"Pronto, mis camaradas! Don Esteban has not been long dead. If we ride to the nearest church, we may be in time to capture Quesada while he makes his confession!"

"But there are few men of the cloth in these hills, and fewer churches," objected Miguel Alvarado. "I know; I was born in the portilla above this pass. My old mother still lives there."

"You do not think that Quesada is a heretic, despite his sacrilegious abuse of the bullfighters' chapel of Seville!"

Miguel shook his head.

"No. I think that he will go, straightway, to the shrine of the Christ of the Pass. It is but a little way on, in a lonely pocket of this gorge. For miles around serranos, burdened by sins, kneel before the shrine, and pray, and beg absolution or ease of mind."

"Muy bueno!" said the captain. "We will go at once to this shrine and wait there, in ambush, for Jacinto Quesada to come and confess his sin. We will listen, and then we will kill him!"

There was a creaking of leather as the men leaped into the saddles. Quesada shrunk back into the dark elbow of the jutting bend. He pressed the nervous horse in against the rock wall. To still any outcry he vised his hand over the trembling nostrils of the animal. He waited, hardly daring to breathe.

The gendarmes, following the lead of the captain,

filed into the pass and looking straight ahead, unsuspecting the dark, went by him almost within arm's length.

He waited until they had all gone on, and the shadows of the pass had engulfed them. Then he did not dodge around the bend and pursue the decurrent way he had been going. He was seized with an unreasoning and irresistible impulse to follow the troop and witness whatever might be the outcome of their expedition to the shrine. Loosening but not removing his hand from the horse's nostrils, he stalked a goodly distance behind the party like a quiet long-legged shadow.

As they neared the boulder-hedged pocket which sheltered the shrine, a whisper sibilated through the ranks of the policemen. Some one was kneeling before the cross!

Noiselessly the gendarmes halted, dismounted, quickly hobbled their horses with the long reins, and crept stealthily forward between the boulders and the ragged prickly shrubbery. Quesada followed, a safe distance behind.

But it was only the old white-haired wife of Don Esteban who knelt before the pale figure of the Christ, with its crown of black horsehair and red-painted wounds. As he crept nearer, behind the police and between the weeds and rocks, Quesada heard her voice. In quavering tones, she was speaking aloud. She was confessing that she was the murderer of her husband, Sergeant Esteban Alvarado!

Thinking herself alone before the moon-white effigy of the crucified Saviour, in an anguish of

soul, she was pouring out the whole pitiful story. For some time, she had been tortured by a harrowing secret. Her son, the darling of her life, although a member of the Guardia Civil like his father, was also a base poseur and highwayman!

It was his infamous plan to doff the policeman's uniform and steal out at night dressed to resemble the bandolero, Jacinto Quesada. Then, his crimes consummated, he would put the uniform on again. That honored uniform and the fact that all his crimes were laid, successfully and invariably, at the door of Jacinto Quesada, kept suspicion from resting upon him.

It had smote her with desolation to discover that her son was a stealthy outlaw. Since that long-ago time when her ancestors had been reclaimed from brigandage and become Miquelets, no one in her family ever again had turned criminal. They had all been policemen.

Her husband, the haughty Don Esteban, was fiercely proud of the record of his family of policemen. It had harassed her poor old soul, filled her with overwhelming terror lest Don Esteban should discover the perfidy of his only son. Pride of house and long years as an officer of the Guardia Civil had made him unforgiving of crime, unsparing and inexorable to mete out justice even to his own kith and kin.

That afternoon, after a lengthy absence on police duty, Don Esteban had come home for an interval of rest. He had just parted from Pascual Montara, he said, who was to take his report down to Getafe.

Between them, the morning prior, they had killed the Wolf of the Sierras, Jacinto Quesada!

The old mother, aghast lest by mistake he had killed his own son masquerading as Quesada, had thereupon, in distracted fear and wild grief, blurted out the whole truth.

The righteous indignation and awful rage of the old sergeant knew no bounds. Solemnly he swore that he would have his son's life for this outrageous conduct. She had pleaded with him, wept and prayed. But he had cast her from him and gone out into the twilight to hound down the son.

She had followed him down the mountainside, insane with fear for the life of her only child. He had discovered her and commanded her to go back. But she crept after him, stifling her sobs.

As he reached the road and the slice of moon came out in the sky, she saw him take out a revolver and examine it to see that it was loaded and ready for use. She heard, on top of this, the clatter of an approaching horse. It was Quesada mounted on the doctor's nag. But she did not know. She thought it was her son, her pobre Miguelito, returning home to pay her a visit between duties!

Carried beyond herself by the sudden crystallizing of all her fears, she had dashed out upon her husband and struggled with him to wrest the revolver from his hands. The stern sergeant had forgot himself then. He went mad with a barbarous fury. He rained blows upon her old tear-stained face. Even did he try to choke her.

But her terror lent her strength superhuman.

She clung to him, pulled and wrenched at the revolver. She was like some tigress fighting for her young.

All at once, there was a sharp hideous explosion. Don Esteban slumped like a burst balloon in her arms. He clutched his chest, made a gurgling sound in his throat, slipped to the ground, rolled over, and was dead!

Now, in a terrible turmoil of soul, she cast her gnarled workworn hands out to that compassionating Figure on the Cross.

"Dios hombre, what shall I do, what shall I do?" she cried. "I have suffered in the last few hours all the torments of the damned, like a soul lost a thousand years in purgatory! Oh, what shall I do? Lord and Saviour, Pitiful One, I do not seek forgiveness. I want to repay, I want to atone! I want to die myself! . . . ."

Her voice fainted away. She got to her feet at last. Muttering feverish prayers, weeping like a soft rain, swaying and stumbling, she made up the path.

The policemen shivered out of their state of suspended animation. They recovered their wits; their dead eyes glinted. Savagely, they turned to look at the man among them who had caused the whole pitiful tragedy—the son of the dead sergeant and the poor old heartbroken mother, the masquerader and the traitor, Miguel Alvarado!

He was gone.

Seeking him, they dashed wildly among the boulders and bushes. They beat the ragged gorse with their carbines. They called loudly one to another.

Suddenly, into the wan moonlight, stepped forth Jacinto Quesada.

"You seek Miguel Alvarado?" he asked.

"Heart of God, yes!"

"Then come with me."

They did not recognize Quesada. Not only because of the pallor of the moonlight, but more because he was garbed in the gray tweeds and foreign slouch hat of the Frenchman. He led them down the path to where they had hobbled their horses.

Here, supine in the weeds and bound hand and foot, lay the policeman, young Miguel. In the midst of his mother's pitiful confession, he had crept back down the road and, just about to mount his horse and ride away, had been captured by Quesada.

"Oh, Paquita, maiden of my soul!" he was wailing. "I am undone—undone! Your love has robbed me of my father, and broken the poor old heart of the mamacita of me!"

Quesada started visibly.

"What is that!" he exclaimed. "You speak of Paquita, daughter of Pepe Flammenca?"

"I speak and dream of her always! I love her—God, yes! And she told me she adored Jacinto Quesada because he was a bandolero; she told me she despised my uniform. I thought to emulate Quesada and thus win her love. But I have only caused the death of my old father and brought sorrow and heartbreak to my poor old mother in her last years. Ah, Senor Don Jesu, pity me!"

But there was that in the glint of the eyes of the clustered policemen which spelled death for Miguel

Alvarado. He was a traitor to all the ethics of the Guardia Civil. He had dishonored and defiled the uniform they wore. He was a wolf in sheep's clothing. More; he was a shepherd dog turned poacher, depredator, wolf!

"He must die!" said the captain.

"Seguramente, yes! And we all must bind ourselves to keep the matter secret."

The captain nodded grimly. "This is an affair of honor between us of the Guardia Civil." He turned sharply upon Quesada.

"Hombre, you are the only outsider. Will you swear to tell no one, to lock all you have heard this night in your own breast?"

Quesada evaded taking the oath of secrecy. Why should he, the Wolf of the Sierras, make covenant with the podencos of the Guardia Civil? Besides, a higher emotion stirred him. In his unknowable Spanish soul, he was moved to pity for Miguel Alvarado.

"Mi capitan," he said, "if you kill this man, you will do a wrong. He is young; he has youth and true penitence to help him reform. It is a terrible lesson he has received this night. He is the dupe of a woman, a wench of the Gitano—"

"A plague on the yellow witch!" muttered Montara.

"Senores," Quesada appealed to them, "you cannot right what is now an irreparable wrong, you cannot bring Don Esteban back to life. Would you rob the poor old mother, then, of her only paltry happiness and hope?

"Heed me, you of the Guardia Civil! This man

has outraged Jacinto Quesada more than he has you. Yet I know that if Jacinto Quesada were to have this Alvarado's fate in his hands, to-night, he would let him go!"

He had done what he could. He moved off to where he had tied his horse to a bush. The policemen conversed together in low tones. As he mounted, Captain Guevara exclaimed:

"But who are you that you tell us all this?"

He kicked his nag and started away. Through the moon-filtering dark, he flung back, "Jacinto Quesada!"

Ere they could recover from their stupefaction, he was only a clattering noise in the night.

He was circling, presently, by the dead body of the old sergeant in the road. Of a sudden, a volley of rifle reports detonated between the rock walls behind him.

"That will be Miguel Alvarado," he said gloomily. He shook his head. "Ah, Paquita!" he exclaimed to the night, "you have exacted a fearful payment for my rash scorn of you—you have killed two men, this night, and broken the heart of a poor old woman!"

He rode thoughtfully on.

CHAPTER XXXVII

LADEN with medicinal supplies, Quesada returned to Minas de la Sierra. He found the American walking about on his own two legs and able, at a pinch, to lend a hand to the doctor. Morales, attenuated but rapidly repairing in strength, occupied the bandolero's old chair tilted against one mud wall of the sick bay. For long hours the matador thus sat in the crisp sunlight and held a-straddle on his knees the slowly recovering, oddly wrinkled little Gabriel. Like some sweet Sister of Mercy, Felicidad moved solicitously among the convalescing serranos, two pale roses of health constantly mantling her smooth ivory cheeks.

The bane was lifting. A period of continuous mild warmth, free of neblinas and snowstorms and icy blasts, had assisted and incalculably sustained the efforts of the hidalgo doctor in driving the pestilence from the pueblo.

Ensued more days of sun sparkle, more nights clear as crystal, and the hospital at last was empty. Announced Don Jaime thereupon:

"The barrio must endure five more days of quarantine. We must make sure the plague is snuffed out, buried. There must be no new cases."

Two days passed. Then three. No man slapped under. They entered upon the fourth.

The scourge was being weighed in a hair-fine balance. It was a deciding interval. It was a terrific

time of waiting, and dread and hungry longing that tried the blood and iron of every man.

Quesada, shaking with the contagious apprehension, buttonholed the American as he came out of the cabanas after completing some mission for the doctor.

"How goes it, Senor Carson?"

"All right so far. But gad, it's tough! It wasn't so bad when they were dying. These days when there are no stricken, and the sick bay is empty, and each man watches the next in fear lest he should succumb—that's maddening!"

They talked jerkily. Quesada wanted to forget the trial of waiting, to ease his mind of the down-bearing strain. To change the subject, he said:

"I have learned something. About the man who was sticking-up persons and saying he was I, Jacinto Quesada. He was a member of the Guardia Civil named Miguel Alvarado. Down by the shrine of Christ of the Pass, his own kind, the Guardia Civil, shot him to death."

The American understood. When Quesada first had returned to the village poisoned with worry at what he had overheard from the policemen then waiting in the gorge, he had told Carson the beginning of the story of the masquerader. Now, at hearing its tragic end, Carson merely nodded. All the while, as he listened, he eyed Don Jaime with fearful anxiety as the physician moved in and out from choza to cabana.

The racking strain—the long torture of work and travail of waiting—showed plainly in the hidalgo doctor,—in the high cheek bones almost bursting

through the deep swarth skin, in the thinly chiseled nose and the gray eyes that seemed crystallized to a hard quartz. He was working arduously, Don Jaime—prodigiously, epically, like a true son of Hispanus, that first Spaniard sprung from the loins of Hercules!

Hardly daring to breathe, the barrio entered upon the fifth and occult day. Twenty-four hours more of immunity from disease, and the tension would be over, the iron clutch of the quarantine lifted.

Night shut down, black, breathing, full of the nameless. Groups collected. The suspense was on them like thumbscrews.

Dawn came slowly, a leaden wash, Don Jaime went his final rounds.

No man had stuck his toes toward heaven; in the night, no man had gone under from the plague. The grip of the horror was broken!

"Infected Minas de la Sierra is once again clean and whole," announced Don Jaime. And he breathed fervently: "Thank God!"

The final requiem had been said. The last to waste away and wear forever the cold cerement of death was the banderillero, Alfonso Robledo, who so ably had seconded Quesada in halting, for the while, Don Jaime's cruel vengeance. That had been six days gone.

The pale gold sun hung high in the heavens like an eucharistic wafer emblematic of victory over disease and death. It was noon of that Day Resurgent. Now that the slavish and heroic labor was over for Don Jaime, the great good accomplished, he quietly got his horse prepared for the return to

his lizard-haunted, gloomy, and lonely casa outside Granada.

Mounted and ready, he paused on the great rock at the brink of the village to bid the thankful serranos a saturnine adieu. All the while, unwaveringly, his gray quartz eyes remained fixed on the certain cabana which had been given over to Felicidad. And then, as loudly the villagers chorused their gratitude and well-wishes, that eventuated which Don Jaime knew would surely eventuate.

Her low white brow knuckled with perplexity, Felicidad appeared in the doorway of the cabana. The hullaballoo had bewildered and attracted her.

"Felicidad!"

As if drawn and irresistibly compelled by the electric fluid of some hypnotic influence, slow as in a trance, Felicidad moved toward the avenger. Watching her, Don Jaime's thin-edged ferule of a face slowly iced into rigid and pitiless lines.

Yet, deep in his heart, the great passions that once had made Don Jaime so formidable—those classic passions of ire and resentment—like hard but friable rock had been slowly worn away. Too often, altogether too often, had his wrathful hand been stayed. Time and his prodigious struggle with the plague had combined to crush and crumble to bits the fury in his rock-ribbed soul.

No longer was he strong with faith in the righteousness of his cause. He was only moved, now, by a determination to fulfill his solemn word, to live up to the oath he had sworn. Pride alone possessed him. He was being swept along toward a damna-

tion of crime by the momentum of an inexorable pride!

He himself felt the weakness, the blight. In an open confession that showed forth his inward doubt, in a heart-poignant appeal to Heaven beseeching leniency for that awful thing he felt he now must do, he cried out:

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; but the bleeding wounds of Christ and the thorn-pierced heart of His Most Virgin Mother shall intercede for my grievously sinning soul on the Day of Judgment!"

He raised the heavy horse-pistol.

The serranos fell from about him like flung chaff. The spittle dried in their mouths; they could not speak. They were blind of eye, and blind and black of brain as to what to do.

The scene was much as before. On the great rock of the village, Don Jaime sat rigid in the saddle like some black-browed Destroying Angel and menaced, with his huge pistol, the pale trembling lily of a girl.

But this time it was not Quesada who intervened. The bandolero long had brooded upon the coming of this inevitable moment; yet now, when ultimately it had struck, the moment found him standing off to one side and a good twenty feet from the great rock where bulked up Don Jaime. Ere the bandolero could interpose himself to obstruct Don Jaime's will, ere he could dash forward to shoulder the perilous rebuttal, came interposition from an unexpected and astonishing source. Stepped forward the American, John Fremont Carson!

Big, broad-shouldered, and wornly angular of

face, Carson stepped before the agitated girl, wholly between her and the threat of the leveled gun. He lifted dauntless blue eyes to her Hebraic Jehovah of a father.

"Senor Don Jaime, you have no longer the right to seek retribution on Felicidad," he said with quiet but positive defiance. "Ere you can retaliate on her, you must deal with me. She is now my affianced bride!"

Don Jaime's jaw sagged; an astounded gleam zigzagged across the hard quartz of his eyes. But quickly came to his aid the iron composure of the hidalgo. Without lowering the pistol, he turned eagle-sharp white head and stony eyes to look down frigidly at the square-jawed American facing him in the street. With a forced politeness, he returned:

"In Spain, know you, Senor Americano, one must ask the father for the hand of his daughter. Should the father agree, the consent of the girl follows as a matter of course. We are very hidebound in these conventions, we Moors; no other ways command honor. The plighted word of a mere chit of a girl —Dios hombre! who would think of respecting that!"

He laughed harshly.

"Grandee of Spain," answered Carson in the same lofty Spanish manner as that used by the father, "in my country, should a man desire a girl, he asks that girl in marriage; if the girl reciprocates, they bother asking by-your-leave of no one else. Neither man nor American woman would consider for a moment allowing a parent to select the companion and helpmate of a lifetime.

"This is not America; this is Spain. I know that, hidalgo doctor; and whenever I can, I try to obey Spain's laws of conduct. I would have sought your agreement and your blessing but for one good reason. Felicidad is no longer your daughter! Because you believe she has dishonored your ancient name, you have publicly disclaimed her as a Torreblanca y Moncada.

"Good God, man!" Carson exclaimed, the untenable and even outrageous incongruity of the doctor's position suddenly hitting him like the smash of a bludgeon. "How can *you* contend for a father's rights over Felicidad after the harsh and cruel way you have used her! Why, at this very moment, you seek her life!"

That struck home. A murderous gleam leaped into Don Jaime's eyes. His eyes blazed like chips of glass.

"Senor Americano," he said huskily, in shaking voice, "do you not know that you are very rash? I am armed and ready; I look at you and see no weapon in your hands. Do you think that a Torreblanca y Moncada will long endure a quarrel in words? I warn you, my cheeky one! Cease challenging my prerogatives! Else shall you provoke me to kill you!"

It was more than a threat. Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada, grandee by birth and breeding, hidalgo of the old granite-jawed, eagle-stern and eagle-haughty Spanish sort, trained the huge horse-pistol, with the words, upon the square-jawed American facing him in the street!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

It exasperated and incensed Carson—this high-handed attempt of the hidalgo to gag and stop his mouth, to cow and overawe his soul.

He did not bother now to temper or anyway mollify his words. Bluntly, boldly, he asserted:

"I know your sort of man, Don Jaime! We have them in my country—the Kentuckians, for instance! You do not really desire to kill Felicidad. Your pride goads you, but your heart is no longer in the work. And now you are more pleased than chagrined that I have stepped forth as her champion—you think to satisfy your pride by working up enough venom against me to bump me off and let the matter end there!

"I'll take my chances, proud hidalgo. I'll fight you every move until bitten by your lead. But you are not going, as you say, to wage much longer this war in words. Very soon you are either going to get hot enough to plug me, or you are going to throw up the sponge! Oh, I know your sort! You'll do one or the other. But one thing you will not do—you will not allow yourself to be made ridiculous!"

Don Jaime was staggered. The American's talk was a talk strange and utterly new to him. John Fremont Carson fought him with weapons that he had not known existed.

Don Jaime lowered the heavy horse-pistol to his

knee. A spirit of sardonic deviltry entered into him. He would worst this cheeky American on his own ground! His lips curling half in smile, half in sneer, a strange light in his eyes, he said:

"Senor Americano, I will combat you and crush you with your own kind of weapon. I will vanquish you with words—with one question! But it must be understood, for the nonce, that I possess unqualifiedly and absolutely the right to speak as Felicidad's father."

The American nodded, a kind of bewildered wonder crowding his eyes.

"For the nonce, that prerogative is yours," he agreed.

"Bueno! Then straightway I challenge you to prove yourself of fit birth to be Felicidad's husband! This is Spain, senor. I speak now as a Spanish father. More; I am a hidalgo, and I speak for my daughter who is the daughter of a hidalgo of Spain! She has an inheritance of blood and pride which you cannot gainsay, but which you must equal if you would marry her!"

Dan Jaime spoke with a Latin fluency of exposition, in a rushing torrent of words. His eyes sparkled like vitreous slag.

"Look you, my cheeky one! No man of common birth may hope to aspire to my daughter. We Spanish grandees are a feudal race, caste-bound and arrogant of birth. Perhaps you do not understand the true color of the situation, eh? Then know you that even in Spain there are not more than a score of men who are my equal in seignior blood and ancient knightly name!

"Now, for any one outside this aristocratic circle to yearn and quest for my daughter's hand would be a sun-daring presumption. Take this Manuel Morales, for an instance." Momentarily his eyes leaped up the street to where the matador stood, his wasted form propped against the mud wall of the hospital.

"Morales is the hero of the peninsula, as you know—a popular idol, a famous and distinguished man. Royalties and hidalgos ask after his health, greet him by name and with handshake. He is the most renowned of modern bullfighters. And he is a rich man—richer far than are most grandees; for much, much gold has come to him along with his well-deserved success.

"Yet never would Morales dare to look for a wife among blooded folk! Indeed, should he be so mad as to presume so far, the hidalgo whom he thus affronted would kill him without ruth, as for a deadly grievance. And at once that hidalgo would be acquitted of all wrong by the public opinion of Spain. Aye, though Morales is the idol of all Spaniards!

"That is right and as it should be; for when all is said, he is only a bullfighter. And bullfighters have no social standing; they are not men of birth nor breeding; they are a low caste. Ask Morales himself. Even now he is nodding agreement to my every word!"

Carson did not trouble to turn his head to gain corroboration of the doctor's statement from the matador up the street. He realized already the poser Don Jaime was soon to spring. He eyed

the haughty hidalgo fixedly, a peculiar smile slowly parting his lips.

"And Quesada," Don Jaime swept on—"Jacinto Quesada is in the same case as Morales. My words apply to him as much as they do to any bullfighter. Not because he is the Wolf of the Sierras, a bandolero and outlaw. Seguramente, no! But only because he is of common birth."

Don Jaime paused. He looked down at the American. The half-smile had altogether fled his lips. His lips were palpably sneering.

"Now as to yourself, my cheeky one!" he said with biting sharpness. "It is often said that the Americans are a nation of *canaille*. Can you prove yourself worthy of the daughter of a Spanish hidalgo and grandee? I ask you that. I wait for your answer."

"You ask me to prove to you that I am not of common birth?"

Don Jaime nodded vigorously. Caspita! this was indeed a trump card! All the venom of his embittered spirit showed.

"You cannot prove that, eh? Then it is true, is it not, that the Americans are a nation of—"

"One moment, Don Jaime. Your Spanish royalty is the keystone, the fountainhead, of Spanish society, is it not? Alfonso, your king, is as good and better an aristocrat than any of his hidalgos—"

"There are some that would dispute you there. Myself, I know my line is older! My ancestors—"

The American was broadly smiling.

"You will admit, however, that Alfonso is of uncommon birth?"

"Seguramente, yes! Is he not my master and lord!"

"Well, then! I was born in the same year as Alfonso, 1886. He was the son of a king; I the son of an American millionaire. Because Alfonso was such a high and mighty infant, his birth was a long-heralded public affair. And so was mine. When I was born, the newspapers of America remarked that here was no common birth. In long articles they compared it to the birth of Alfonso, citing statistics to show the principalities in mines and manufactories I would rule, the kingly revenues that would pour annually into my coffers of state.

"Alfonso's actual birth was marked by great pomp and a certain ceremony. To prove that he was truly the son of his royal mother, that everything was aboveboard and as it should be, in the room with the queen, when Alfonso first put in an appearance, were a round dozen and more hidalgos—"

"That is our Spanish custom when royal infants are born."

"Just so. A very uncommon birth! Well, with my mother, when first I put in an appearance, were a round dozen doctors and nurses of all kinds, trained and practical, wet and dry! Quite an uncommon birth, too, don't you think?"

What could Don Jaime do? Carson had worsted him signally. The grim drama had become almost a comedy, a farce!

Don Jaime feared longer to persist. It would not do for him to be made ridiculous and laughable.

All at once he lifted his head and looked beyond

Carson, beyond Felicidad. In a great voice, he called out:

"Put up your gun, Quesada! I am a wineskin squeezed dry; I am empty of all words and all passions; I am done! Put up your gun, you Wolf-Cub you, and I will put up mine! I had meant to beat you to the first shot—to kill Felicidad and then have you kill me! But now—Carajo, I am done!"

Like mechanical toys on clockwork pivots, every man and woman within sound of the doctor's great voice, turned simultaneously to look for Quesada.

There, twenty feet away, stood the wolfishly gaunt bandolero, a revolver in his right hand trained rigidly on Don Jaime! That revolver had once been Jacques Ferou's!

Not before had John Fremont Carson noticed the revolver in Quesada's hand. He was taken completely by surprise. Little had he realized how close to black tragedy had been the drama in which he had enacted so prominent a part!

In the American's eyes, in the eyes of every man there present, the hidalgo on horseback loomed up, then and on the sudden, with a new and imposing dignity, a rare nobility and magnificence. Don Jaime alone had known of the imminent threat of Quesada's revolver. All the while he had striven to attain his vengeance, all that while Don Jaime had trusted his life to a hair. Quesada had him covered. The mere press of a finger on the trigger, and Don Jaime would have toppled out of the saddle—a dead man!

Quesada had thought Don Jaime all unaware.

Now, for the first time, he comprehended the sublime insolence of the hidalgo's persistency. Abashed and shamefaced, he lowered the revolver and shoved it back into his belt.

Don Jaime lifted the horse-pistol from his knee and slipped it into the holster slung from the saddle. Then, without another word and without even a glance toward his daughter, he turned the old nag's head about and went deliberately down the goat path.

He never once looked round. But his back seemed not quite so rigid nor his old white head so erect. All at once there were about the unmistakable signs of an old, old man. And in the slow pace of the faithful nag, there seemed something that wanted to linger yet was urged on by pride, inexorable and pitiless.

"Oh, mi pobre padre!" wailed Felicidad after him. "His heart breaks and he is lonely! And there is only old whining Pedro and the childish Teresa to welcome him back to the gloomy casa!"

Save for the creaking of the saddle, the soft pad-pad of the horse's hoof-falls, nothing answered from down the goat path. For the first time then, in all that intolerable eternity of death and disease and lusting vengeance, Felicidad wilted in a swoon to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"By gad!" exclaimed Carson, leaping to the side of Felicidad and lifting her tenderly in his arms. "There will yet be a wedding down in the casa of Torreblanca y Moncada outside Granada! Come, Jacinto; lend us your aid. Get horses! We must overtake the hidalgo doctor!"

"There are no horses in Minas de la Sierra," returned Quesada. "There are only mules and borricos which the serranos use to sleigh their cords of pine down to the lower torrents, and to carry their panniers of white manzanilla into the towns."

"Anything!" urged the American. Felicidad in his arms was showing signs of recovering consciousness. "Mules, borricos, anything upon which we can ride!"

"Muy bueno," assented Quesada readily. "It is very good, and I will go along with you. They say Jacinto Quesada is dead; I can ride the roads with impunity. And the roads are paved with gold for such as I!"

"I will go also," volunteered Morales—"I, and what remains of my cuadrilla. In his offices down in Seville sits my manager, the Senor Don Arturo Guerra, signing contract after contract; and these contracts I must soon fulfill, or lose much money and much prestige with the presidentes of the bull rings and the aficionados of Spain."

"Hola, mis serranos!" called Quesada. "Fetch

forth your beasts. The caballeros would look at them and pay you well in golden notes on the Bank of Spain!"

A little later, the cavalcade wound down the loops of the goat path. In all the pueblo, there had proved to be only three burden-bearing animals—two mules and one ass. However, Morales' cuadrilla had been depleted by the loss through the plague of Alfonso Robledo and Coruncho Lopez, and the death in the rebellion of the banderillero, Baptista Monterey; so the party managed, by doubling up, to make shift.

There were altogether seven of them. Morales and the three surviving men of the cuadrilla paired off on the two mules. Felicidad, still pale from her faint and pensive with longing, jogged behind Carson on the crupper of the sturdy sure-footed ass.

Quesada laughed when they begged him also to mount one of the mules.

"It would be too much for the animal. And besides," he added with a return of his old pride, "I am the Wolf of the Sierras. My long mountaineer's legs are swifter to move now and even more tireless than the slow hoofs of any stupid borrico. Hold your peace, mis camaradas. Ere nightfall, you shall see!"

Accoutred in the neat gray tweeds and slouch hat of the deceased Frenchman, he led the way with swinging strides. Long after they had disappeared down the gorge, the mountain boy Gabriel, yellow of skin and oddly wrinkled of face, stood on the rock at the brink of the village and sought to follow them with his wistful eyes.

The cavalcade convoluted through the gorges. Never once did they sight the senor doctor. Mounted as he was on the nag, slow with age yet swifter-paced than the ambling donkeys, the hidalgo had easily put dust and distance between them, and buried himself in the lower passes.

They came, in the due course of nights and days, to the mournful Pass of the Blessed Trinity. There were three diverging roads leading out and down from it. Quesada, many yards in the lead, waited until the cavalcade overtook him. Then pointing to that dusty road which snaked most sweepingly to the left, he said:

"Felicidad will now recognize the way. That road winds through the Alpujarras and directly down into Granada. For myself, I bid thee adios!"

Felicidad exclaimed in surprise and deep disappointment:

"You are going to desolate us, Jacintito, by absenting yourself?"

"And you are not going to help us assault the hidalgo doctor's casa with bell and book and ring?" from Morales.

Said the American with quiet appeal, "I intended you for my best man, Jacinto."

But to all Quesada shook his head in dissent.

"Down in Getafe," he returned, "there are ten thousand pesetas awaiting me—the reward for my own death!"

"But that affair of the Christ of the Pass!" exclaimed Carson. "You there proclaimed yourself to the police as still alive. The Guardia Civil must know now that Montara and the dead sergeant

made a mistake. They may even guess it was Ferou that was killed. To go to Getafe, after all this, will be to put your head into a noose!"

Quesada smiled grimly.

"But they may have taken me for a rank impostor. They may have thought me some serrano friend of the Alvarados who, overhearing the old mother's story and lacking ingenuity, announced myself as Jacinto Quesada just to dumbfound the police and save poor Miguel."

"Hardly likely," remarked Carson drily.

"Ea pues!" exclaimed Quesada. "Well, then! How about the fact that the honor of the Guardia Civil was jeopardized by young Alvarado's treachery and that, before my very eyes, Capitan Luis Guevara and his troop swore themselves to secrecy? Senor Carson, you do not know the Spanish police as do I. Even as Don Jaime and Sargento Esteban Alvarado thought more of their personal honor than they did of the lives of their offspring, even and just so do the Guardia Civil think more of their honor and good name than they do of capturing a mere bandolero, of keeping secure the peace of Spain!

"That troop of police has not told headquarters. I am even taking the chance that Montara filed his report as if nothing had happened that night at the shrine. Getafe will not know of my resurrection until I play this little trick. For the interval, I am Monsenor Jacques Ferou!"

"It is a coup!" enthused Morales.

"But a tremendously risky one," qualified the American dubiously. "You stand to win ten thou-

sand pesetas, Quesada, but you stand by far longer odds to lose your life. For what do you need money so badly, Jacinto, that you should stake red alfonsos against your precious neck?"

"Am I not forever risking everything to gain mere gold?" countered Quesada. "But carajo! that is not my reason. I have a higher incentive."

His gaunt face became priestly with a sudden somber tenderness.

"Up in Minas de la Sierra," he went on, "there is a mountaineer's orphan bantling with heart of fire and soul of gold. To-day he dreams to be a great man of Spain. But the God of Spain smiles derisively upon a son of the people who would seek to rise above his fellows. Spain is a country of limited opportunities. Here there are only two careers open for a son of the soil. My little mountain brat may become a bullfighter, a gran espada like our Manuel; or he may become a bandolero like me. There is naught else for him. I know, Senor Carson; I have lived Spain myself!

"Up here in these desolate hills, my lad is too far removed from the cities of the plains. Never will he see the brutal savage encounter of bull and man; never will be waked in him the glamour and ambition for the blood and sand of the arena. Never will he be a bullfighter!

"But carajo! never shall he be a bandolero! I, Jacinto Quesada, say it! I will not have him go houseless in the wind and rain, forever hounded by the podencos of the Guardia Civil. By the Nails of Christ, no!"

"What would you then, Jacinto?" asked Felicidad with the quick sympathy of a woman.

Interposed the matador with a sudden deep interest: "Of what child do you speak, Quesada?"

"Of the boy Gabriel! Half of the blood money shall be used to send him to the great University of Salamanca! I will make our little Gabriel a superb senor doctor like Felicidad's own haughty father, Don Jaime!"

"I will put an equal amount to the furtherance of the noble project!" Morales pledged himself enthusiastically.

"But the other half, Quesada?" questioned Carson with characteristic acuteness. "What do you purpose doing with the remaining five thousand pesetas?"

"I have a plan wherewith to use them," returned Quesada evasively.

He started away. He would say no more. Waving his hand to them in adieu, he called back:

"Go thou with God, my friends. The orange trees of the Alpujarras are in white and fragrant bloom. To thee, Senor Carson, and to mia camarista Felicidad, I wish all the blessings of God on thy new and great happiness!"

A week later, a wolfishly gaunt man in gray tweeds and slouch traveling hat invaded the headquarters of the Guardia Civil at Getafe and presented himself before the desk sergeant.

"I am Monsenor Jacques Ferou," he said. "I come to claim the reward for the killing, up in

Minas de la Sierra, of the bandolero, Jacinto Quesada."

The desk sergeant was very glad to meet Senor Ferou. He shook his hand warmly. He knew from the foreign swagger of his clothes that the man was an outlander. As with all Spaniards, he had two guesses as to the country of the stranger's nativity. From the man's name then and swarthy complexion, he decided, by some unaccountable quirk of the mind, that he was an Englishman!

To secure the authority and money, he dispatched one of the policemen waiting in the room to the office of the Ministro de Gobernacion. Meanwhile, making conversation, he politely inquired whether Senor Ferou liked the country.

"Si; I like Spain very much," the pseudo-Englishman returned, smiling pleasantly. "I have made many good friends here, and Dios sabe! perhaps a few poor enemies. I shall remain here for some time."

"That was a very brave thing you did up in the Sierra Nevadas. Jacinto Quesada has long harassed and terrorized us poor Moors. All Spain thanks you and feels you well merit the reward. But have you any plans for the spending of all those pesetas?"

"I have two plans. One is to aid a protege of mine, a motherless little child; the other to pay the costs of a certain fete. There is going to be a wedding over in the foothills of the Sierra Morena. It is to be a wedding among the gypsies. You know how costly and lavish are the marital feasts of the Zincali. They celebrate for two weeks,

hand-running, just like the Jews of Barbary. You see, sargento mio, I am to marry a girl of the Gitano, one Paquita, daughter of Pepe Flammenca, count of a gypsy clan!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the sergeant, his face wrinkling into a broad smile. "Most certainly are you English both eccentric and adventurous! But you seek your love in such strange places! Do not our white, soft-eyed maids of Andalusia captivate you?"

"They do not," returned the man in the gray tweeds with vehemence. "When your Andalusian virgins caress me with languishing looks and their tongues drip liquid flattery and love, my masculinity rebels at the thought of being wooed by a woman. You know we Englishmen joy in being the seeker, the stalker, the predatory one!"

"Eh, eh! This Gitana treated you with disdain, what? She fled from you, was cold to your kisses, took on as if you were a dust-mote in her eye, no? Perhaps she even prodded a knife between your ribs —it is a way they have, these soft brown leopards of the Zincali!"

"She did more than that. She stabbed at my pride. She made love to another man, a sad fool, whom she had imitate and ape me just to show how little importa I was—"

The policeman returned, just then, holding in his hand two five-thousand peseta bills and a receipt to be signed. The man in the gray tweeds affixed his name with a flourish. Then the sergeant handed him the bills and although his eyes were greedy, he politely said:

"Go thou with God, my brave Englishman, and may Heaven bless your coming happiness."

He looked after the man as he went out the door, and sighed heavily.

"Ah, I knew them well when I was young, the brown maidens of the Zincali! They are wine to kiss and soft silk to caress, but the very tigers when aroused. But I am getting on now—getting on and too old for such thoughts!"

He looked down at the receipt in his hand. He started.

"Dios hombre!" he ejaculated.

The policemen crowded around him. But he had recovered.

"It is nothing," he said.

He went back to his desk. There, for a long time, slyly and secretly he eyed the receipt the man had given him. Upon it was written:

"Received payment, Jacinto Quesada."

Very stealthily, the desk sergeant tore the paper into a thousand little bits.

THE END

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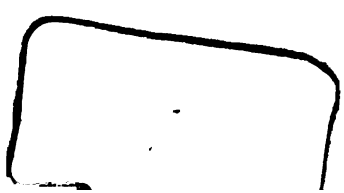
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